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The Refugees

A Tale of two Continents

Chap I
The Man from America

It was the sort of window which was common in Paris about the end of the seventeenth century. It was high, diamond-paned, with a broad mullion across the centre and above the middle of the mullion a tiny coat-of-arms, three caltrops gules upon a field argent, let into the glass. Outside there ~~[illegible]~~ projected a stout iron rod, ~~and~~ from the end of which ~~[illegible]~~ hung a little gilded miniature of a wool bale which swung and squeaked with every puff of wind. Beyond that again were the houses of the other side, high, narrow, and prim, slashed with diagonal woodwork in front, and topped with a bristle of sharp gables and corner turrets. Between were the cobblestones of the Rue St Martin, and the clatter of innumerable feet.

Inside, the window was furnished with a broad bancal of brown stamped Spanish ~~[illegible]~~ leather where the family might recline and have an eye, from behind the curtains, on all that was going forward in the busy world beneath them. Two of them sat there now, a man and a woman but their backs were turned to the spectacle and their faces to the large and richly furnished room. From time to time they stole a glance at each other and their eyes told that they needed no other sight to make them happy.

Nor was it to be wondered at, for they were a well favoured pair. She was very young, twenty at the most, with a face which was pale indeed, and yet of a

The Refugees

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Chap I

The Swamp-Town Massacre

brilliant pallor which was so clear and fresh, and carried with it such a suggestion of purity and innocence that one would not wish it's maiden grace to be marred by an intrusion of colour. Her features were delicate and sweet and her blue-black hair, and long dark eyelashes formed a piquant contrast to her dreamy gray eyes and her ivory skin. In her whole expression there was something quiet and subdued which was accentuated by her simple dress of black taffeta and by the little ~~black~~ jet brooch and bracelet which were her sole ornaments. Such was Adèle Catinat, the only daughter of the famous Huguenot cloth merchant.

But if her dress were sombre it was atoned for by the magnificence of her companion. He was a man who might have been ten years her senior, with a keen soldier face, small well marked features, a carefully trimmed black moustache, and ~~an~~ a dark hazel eye which might ~~not~~ harden to ~~question~~ command a man, or ~~might~~ soften to supplicate a woman, and be successful at either. His coat was of sky blue, slashed across with silver braidings, and with broad silver shoulderstraps on either side. A vest of white Callamanca peeped out from beneath it, and knee breeches of the same disappeared into high polished boots with gilt spurs upon the heels. A silver hilted rapier and a plumed cap lying upon a settle beside him completed a costume which was a badge of honour to the wearer, for any Frenchman would have recognised it as being that of an officer in the famous blue guard of Louis the fourteenth. A trim dashing soldier he looked, ~~from~~ with his curling black hair and well poised head. ~~and~~ Such he had proved himself before now in the field too until the name of Amory de Catinat had become conspicuous among the thousands of the valliant lesser noblesse who had flocked into the service of the king.

They were first cousins these two, and there

was just sufficient resemblance in their element features to recall the relationship. De Catinat was sprung from a noble Huguenot family, but, having lost his parents early he had joined the army and had worked his way without influence and against all odds to his present position. His father's younger brother however, finding every path to fortune barred to him through the persecution to which men of his faith were already subjected, had dropped the 'de' which implied his noble descent and had taken to trade in the City of Paris, with such success that he was now one of the richest and most prominent citizens of the town. It was under his roof that the guardsman now sat, and it was his only daughter whose white hand he held in his own.

"Tell me, Adèle" said he "Why do you look troubled?"

"I am not troubled, Amory"

"Come, there is just one little line between those curving brows. Ah, I can read you, you see, as a shepherd reads the sky"

"It is nothing, Amory, but —"

"But what?"

"You leave me this evening"

"But only to return tomorrow."

"And must you really really go tonight?"

"It would be as much as my commission is worth to be absent. Why, I am on duty tomorrow morning outside the king's bedroom! After chapel time Major de Brissac will take my place and then I am free once more"

"Ah, Amory, when you talk of the king and the court and the grand ladies you fill me with wonder"

"And why with wonder?"

"To think that you who live amid such splendour

should stoop to the humble room of a mercer"

"Ah, but what does the room contain?"

"There is the greatest wonder of all. That you who pass your days amid such people, so beautiful, so witty, should think me worthy of your love, I, who am such a quiet little mouse, all alone in this great house, so shy and so backward! It is wonderful!"

"Every man has his own taste" stroking the tiny hand said her cousin. "It is with woman as ~~[illegible]~~ with flowers. Some may prefer the great brilliant sunflower or the rose which is so bright and large that it must ever catch the eye. But give me the ~~[illegible]~~ little violet which hides among the mosses and yet is so sweet to look upon, and sheds it's fragrance ~~all~~ round it. But still that line upon your brow, dearest!"

"I was wishing that father would return"

"And why? Are you so lonely then?"

~~She~~ Her pale face lit up with a quick smile "I shall not be lonely until tonight. But I am always uneasy when he is away. One ~~[illegible]~~ hears so much now of the persecution of our poor brethern"

"Tut, my uncle can defy them"

"He has gone to the provost of the mercer guild about this notice of the quartering of the dragoons"

"Ah, you have not told me of that"

"Here 'tis" She rose and took up a slip of blue paper with a red seal dangling from it which lay upon the table. His ~~[illegible]~~ strong black brows knitted together as he glanced at it.

"Take notice" it ran "that you Theophile Catinat cloth mercer of the Rue St Martin are hereby required to give shelter and rations to twenty men of the Languedoc blue dragoons under Captain Walbert until such time as you receive a further notice (signed) De Beaupre
(Commissioner of the king)

De Catinat knew well how this method of annoying Huguenots had been practised all over France, but he had flattered himself that his own position at court would have ensured his kinsman from such an outrage. He threw the paper down with an exclamation of anger.

"When do they come?"

"Father said tonight"

"Then they shall not be here long. Tomorrow I shall have an order to remove them. But the sun has sunk behind St Martin's church and I should already be upon my way"

"No, no, you must not go yet"

"I would that I could give you into your father's charge first for I fear to leave you alone when those troopers may come. And yet no excuse will avail me if I am not at Versailles. But see, a horseman has stopped before the door! He is not in uniform. Perhaps he is a messenger from your father"

The girl ran eagerly to the window and peered out with her hand resting upon her cousin's silver-corded shoulder.

"Ah!" she cried "I had forgotten. It is the man from America. Father said that he would come today"

"The man from America!" repeated the soldier in a tone of surprise, and they both craned their necks from the window.

The horseman, a sturdy broad shouldered young man, clean shaven and crop haired, turned his long swarthy face and his bold features in their direction as he ran his eye over the front of the house. He had a soft-brimmed gray hat of a shape which was strange to Parisian eyes, but his sombre clothes and high boots were such as any citizen might have worn. Yet his general appearance was so unusual that a group of townsfolk had already assembled round him, staring with open mouth at his horse and himself.

A battered gun with an extremely long brown barrel was fastened by the stock to his stirrup while the muzzle stuck up in to the air behind him. At each ~~saddle bow~~ holster was a large dangling black bag, and a gaily coloured red slashed blanket was rolled up at the back of his saddle. His horse, a strong limbed dapple-gray, ~~was~~ all shiney with sweat above, and all caked with mud beneath, ~~and~~ bent it's forekneeo as it stood, as though it were overspent. The rider however, having satisfied himself as to the horse, sprang lightly out of his saddle, and, disengaging his gun, his blanket, and his bags, pushed his way unconcernedly through the gaping crowd and knocked loudly at the door.

"Who is he then?" asked de Catinat "A Canadian? I am almost one myself. I have as many friends on one side of the sea as on the others. Perchance I know him. There are not so many white faces yonder and in two years there was scarce one from the Saguenay to ~~the~~ Nipissing that I had not seen"

"Nay, he is from the English provinces, Amory. But he speaks our tongue. His mother was of our blood"

"And his name?"

"Is Amos – Amos – ah, these names! Yes, Green, that was it. Amos Green. His father and mine have done much trade together, and now his son, who, as I understand, has lived ever in the woods is sent here to see something of men and cities. Ah, my God, what can have happened now?"

A sudden chorus of screams and cries had broken out from the passage beneath with the shouting of a man and the sound of rushing steps. In an instant de Catinat was half way down the stairs and was staring in amazement at the scene in the Hall beneath.

Two maids ~~screamed~~ stood, screaming at the

pitch of their lungs at either side. In the centre the old man-servant Pierre, a stern old Calvinist, whose dignity had never before been shaken, was spinning round, waving his arms, and ~~shrieking~~ roaring so that he might have been heard at the Louvre. Attached to the gray worsted stocking which covered his fleshless calf was a ~~large~~ fluffy black hairy ball with one little red eye glancing up, and the gleam of two white teeth where it held its grip. At the shrieks the young stranger, who had gone out to his horse, came rushing back, and, plucking the creature off, he slapped it twice across the snout, and plunged it head-foremost back into the leather bag from which it had emerged.

"It is nothing" said he, speaking in excellent French "It is only a bear"

"Ah, my God!" cried Pierre, wiping the drops from his brow "Ah, it has aged me five years! I was at the door bowing to monsieur and in a moment it had me from behind"

"It was my fault for leaving the bag loose. ~~But~~ The creature was but pupped the day we left New York, six weeks come tuesday. Do I speak with my father's friend, Monsieur Catinat?"

"No, Monsieur" said the guardsman from the staircase "My uncle is out, but I am Captain de Catinat at your service, and here is Mademoiselle Catinat who is your hostess"

The stranger ascended the stair, and ~~shook hands with them both~~ paid his greetings with the air of a man who was as shy as a wild deer, and yet who had steeled himself to carry a thing through. He walked with them to the sitting room, and then in an instant was gone again and they heard his feet thudding upon the stairs. Presently he was back ~~again~~ with a lovely glossy skin in his hands.

"The bear is for your father, mademoiselle" said he "This little skin I have brought from America for you. It is but a trifle and yet it may serve to make a pair of moccassins or a pouch"

Adèle gave a cry of delight as her hands sank into the depths of it's softness. She might well admire it for no king in the world could have had a finer skin.

"Ah, it is beautiful, monsieur" she cried "And what creature is it and where did it come from?"

"It is a black fox. I shot it myself last fall up near the Iroquois villages at Lake Oneida."

She pressed it to her cheek, her white face showing up like marble against it's absolute blackness. "I am sorry my father is not here to welcome you, monsieur" she said "but I do so very heartily in his place. Your room is above. Pierre will show you to it if you wish"

"My room. For what?"

"Why, monsieur, to sleep in!"

"And must I sleep in a room?"

De Catinat laughed at the gloomy face of the American. "You shall not sleep there if you do not wish" said he.

The other brightened at once, and stepped across to the further window which looked down upon the courtyard. "Ah" he cried "There is a beech tree there! Mademoiselle, if I might take my blanket out yonder I should like it better than any room. In winter indeed one must do it, but in summer I am smothered with a ceiling pressing down upon ~~you~~ me."

"You are not from a town then?" said de Catinat

"My father lives in New York — two doors from the house of Peter Stuyvesant of whom you must have heard. He is a very hardy man, and he can do it, but I — even a few days of Albany or of Schenectady are enough

for me. My life has been in the woods"

"I am sure that my father would wish you to sleep where you like and to do what you like, as long as it makes you happy"

"I thank you, mademoiselle. Then I shall take my things out there and I shall groom my horse"

"Nay, there is Pierre!"

"I am used to doing it myself"

"Then I will come with you" said de Catenat, "for I would have a word with you. Until tomorrow then, Adèle, farewell!"

"Until tomorrow, Amory"

The two young men passed downstairs together and the guardsman followed the American out into the yard.

"You have had a long journey" he said

"Yes, from Rouen"

"Are you tired?"

"No, I am seldom tired"

"Remain with the lady then until her father comes back"

"Why do you say that"

"Because I have to go, and she might need a protector"

The stranger said nothing but he nodded and, throwing off his black coat, set to work vigorously rubbing down his travel stained horse.

~~[illegible]~~
Chap II.
A Monarch in dishabille
~~[illegible]~~. ~~[illegible]~~.

~~[illegible]~~ que.

It was the morning after the Guardsman had returned to his duties. Eight o'clock had struck on the great clock of Versailles and it was almost time for the monarch to rise. Through all the long corridors and frescoed passages of the monster palace there was a subdued hum and rustle with a low muffled stir of preparation, for the rising of the king was a great state function in which many had a part to play. A servant with a steaming silver saucer hurried past, bearing it to Monsieur de St Quentin, the state barber. Others with clothes thrown over their arms ~~hurried~~ bustled down the passage which led to the antechamber. The knot of ~~[illegible]~~ Guardsmen in their gorgeous blue and ~~golden~~ silver coats straightened themselves up and brought their halberts to attention, while the ~~young~~ young officer ~~[illegible]~~, who had been looking wistfully out of the window at some ~~young~~ courtiers who were laughing and chatting on the terraces ~~outside~~, turned sharply upon his heel and strode over to the white and gold door of the Royal bedroom.

He had hardly taken his stand there before the handle was very gently turned from within, the door revolved noiselessly upon it's hinges, and a man slid silently through the aperture, closing it again behind him.

"Hush!" said he, with his finger to his thin precise lips, while ~~and~~ his whole clean shaven face and high arched brows were an entreaty and a warning "The King still sleeps"

The words were whispered from one to another among the group who had assembled outside the door. The speaker, who was Monsieur Bontems, head valet de chambre, gave a sign to the ~~young~~ officer of the Guard, and led him into the window alcove from which he had lately come.

"Good morning, Captain de Catinat" said he, with a mixture of familiarity and respect in his manner.

"Good morning, Bontems. How has the king slept?"

"Admirably"

"But it is his time"

"Hardly"

"You will not rouse him ~~then~~ yet?"

"In seven and a half minutes", the valet pulled out the little round watch which gave the law to the man who was the law to twenty millions of people. "Who commands at the main guard?"

"Major de Brissac"

"And you will be here?"

"For four hours I attend the king"

"Very good. He gave me some instructions for the officer of the guard when he was alone last night after the petit coucher. He bade me to say that Monsieur de Vivonne was not to be admitted to the grand lever. You are to tell him so."

"I shall do so"

"Then should a note come from her — you understand me — the new one —"

"Madame de Maintenon"

"Precisely. But it is more discreet not to mention names. Should she send a note you will take it and deliver it quietly when the king gives you an opportunity"

"It shall be done"

"But if the other should come, as is possible enough — the other, you understand me, the former —"

"Madame de Montespan"

"Ah, that soldierly tongue of yours, Captain! Should she come, I say, you will gently bar her way, with courteous words, you understand, but on no account is she to be permitted to enter the Royal room."

"Very good, Bontems"

"And now we have but three minutes!" He strode ~~with~~ through the rapidly increasing group of people in the corridor with an air of proud humility, as befitted a man, who if he were a valet, was atleast by being the valet of the king the king of valets. Close by the door stood a line of footmen, resplendent in their powdered wigs, ~~bright blue~~ red plush coats and silver shoulderknots.

"Is the officer of the oven here?" asked Bontems

"Yes, sir" replied a functionary who bore in front of him an enamelled tray heaped with pine shavings.

"The opener of the shutters?"

"Here, sir"

"The remover of the taper?"

"Here, sir"

"Be ready for the word" He turned the handle once more and slipped into the darkened room.

It was a large square apartment with two high windows upon the further side, curtained across with priceless velvet hangings. Through the chinks ~~opened which~~ the morning sun shot a few little gleams ~~of light~~ which widened as they crossed the room to break in bright blurs of light upon the primrose tinted wall. A large armchair stood by the side of the burned-out fire, shadowed over by the huge marble mantelpiece, the back of which was carried up, twining and curving into a thousand arabesque and armorial devices until it blended with the richly painted ceiling. In one corner ~~of the narrow~~ a narrow couch with a rug thrown across it showed where the faithful Bontems had spent the night.

In the very centre of the chamber there stood a large ~~square~~ four-post bed, with curtains of Gobelin tapestry, looped back from the pillow. A square of polished rails surrounded it, leaving a space some five feet in width all round between the enclosure and the bedside.

Within this enclosure or ruelle stood a small round table, covered over with a white napkin upon which ~~stood~~ lay a silver platter and an enamelled cup, the one containing a little Frontiniac wine and water, and the other bearing three slices of the breast of a chicken in case the king should hunger during the night.

As Bontemo passed noiselessly across the room, his feet sinking into the mosslike carpet, there was the heavy close smell of sleep in the air, and he could hear the long thin breathing of the sleeper. He passed through the opening in the rails, and stood, watch in hand, waiting for the exact instant when the iron routine of the court demanded that the monarch should be roused. Beneath him from ~~beneath~~ under the costly green coverlet of Oriental silk, half buried in the fluffy white Valenciennes lace which edged the pillow, there protruded a round black bristle of close-cropped hair, with the profile of a curving nose, and petulant lip outlined against the white background. The valet snapped his watch, and ~~bent~~ bent over the sleeper.

"~~Sire~~ I have the honour to inform your Majesty that it is half past eight" said he

"Ah!" The king slowly opened his large dark brown eyes, yawned, made the sign of the cross, and kissed a little dark reliquary which he drew from under his night dress. Then he sat up in bed, and blinked about him with the air of a man who is collecting his thoughts.

"Did you give my ~~orders~~ orders to the Officer of the Guard, Bontemo?" he asked

"Yes, sire."

"Who is on duty?"

"Major de Briasac at the main guard, and Captain de Catinat in the corridor"

"De Catinat! Ah, the young man who stopped my horse at Fontainebleau. I remember him. You may give the signal, Bontemo"

The chief valet walked swiftly across to the door and threw it open. In rushed the officer of the ovens, and the four ~~blue~~ red coated, white wigged footmen, ready handed, silent-footed, each intent upon his own duties. The one seized upon Bontems' rug and couch, and in an instant had whipped them off into an antechamber, another had carried away the 'en cas' meal, and the silver taperstand, while a third drew back the great curtains of ~~leaped~~ stamped velvet and let a flood of light into the apartment. Then, as the flames were already flickering among the pine shavings in the fireplace, the officer of the ovens placed two round logs crosswise above them (for the morning air was chilly, ~~tho' it was still but early autumn~~) and withdrew with his fellow servants.

They were hardly gone before a more august group entered the bedchamber. ~~[illegible]~~ Two walked together in front, the one a ~~man~~ youth little over twenty years of age, middlesized, inclining to stoutness, with a slow pompous bearing, a well turned leg, and a face which ~~was~~ would have been ~~[illegible]~~ comely enough in a masklike fashion, but which was devoid of any shadow of expression, ~~[illegible]~~ except perhaps of an occasional lurking ~~[illegible]~~ gleam of mischievous humour. He was richly clad in plumcoloured velvet, with a broad band of blue silk across his breast, and the glittering edge of the order of St Louis protruding from under it. His companion was a man of forty, swarthy, dignified and solemn, in a plain but rich dress of black silk with dashes of gold at the neck and sleeves. As the pair faced the king there was sufficient resemblance between the three faces to show that they were of one blood, and to enable a stranger to guess that the older was ~~Monsieur, the monsieur par excellence~~ Monseigneur, the younger brother of the king, while the other was Louis the dauphin, his only legitimate child, and heir to a throne to which in the strange workings of Providence, neither he nor his sons

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were destined to ascend.

Strong as was the likeness between the three faces, each with the curving Bourbon nose, the large full eye, and the thick Hapsburg underlip, ~~which was~~ their common heritage from Anne of Austria, there was still a vast difference of temperament and character stamped upon their features. The king was now in his six and fortieth year, and the cropped black head was already thinning a little on the top, and shading away to gray over the temples. He still however retained much of the beauty of his youth, tempered by the dignity and sternness which encreased with his years. His dark eyes were full of expression, and his clear cut features were the delight of the sculptor and the painter. His firm and yet sensitive mouth and his thick well-arched brows gave an air of authority and power to his face, while the more subdued expression which was habitual to his brother marked the man whose whole life had been spent in one long exercise of deference and self-effacement. The Dauphin on the other hand with a more regular face than his father had none of that quick play of ~~expression~~ feature when excited, or that kingly serenity when composed, which had made a shrewd observer say that Louis, if he were not the greatest monarch that ever lived, was atleast the best fitted to act the part.

Behind the king's son and the king's brother, there entered a little group of notables and of officials, whom duty had called to this daily ceremony. There was the grand master of the robes, the first lord of the bedchamber, the Duc du Maine, a pale youth clad in black velvet, limping heavily with his left leg, and his little brother, the young Comte de Toulouse, both of them the illegitimate sons of Madame de Montespan and the king. Behind them again was the first valet of the wardrobe, followed by Fagon the first physician, Telier

the head surgeon, and three ~~footmen~~ pages in scarlet and gold who bore the Royal clothes. Such were the partakers in the family entry, the highest honour which the Court of France could aspire to.

Bontemo had poured upon the king's hands a few drops of spirits of wine, catching them again in a silver dish, ~~and~~ while the first lord of the bedchamber had presented the bowl of holy water with which he made the sign of the cross, muttering to himself the short office of the Holy Ghost. Then with a nod to his brother (and a short word of greeting to the Dauphin, and to the Duc du Maine, he swung his legs over the side of the bed, and sat in his long silken night dress, his little white feet dangling from beneath it, — a perilous position for any man to assume ~~before others~~, were it not that he had so heartfelt a sense of his own dignity that he could not realise that under any circumstance it ~~could~~ might be compromised in the eyes of others. So he sat, the master of France, and yet the slave to every puff of wind, for a wandering draught had set him shivering and shaking. Monsieur de St Quentin, the noble barber, flung a purple dressing-gown over ~~his~~ the royal shoulders, and placed a long many curled Court wig upon his head, while Bontems drew on his red stockings, and laid before him his slippers of embroidered velvet. The monarch thrust his feet into them, tied his dressing gown, and passed out to the fireplace, where he settled himself down in his easy chair, holding out his thin delicate hands towards the blazing logs, while the others stood round in a semicircle waiting for the 'grand lever' which was to follow.

"How this, Messieurs?" the king asked suddenly, glancing round him with a petulant face "I am conscious of a smell of scent. Surely none of you

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would venture to bring perfume into the presence, knowing, as you must all do, how offensive it is to me."

The little group glanced from one to the other with protestations of innocence. The faithful Bontems however with his stealthy step had passed along behind them, and had detected the offender.

"My Lord of Toulouse, the smell comes from you" he said

The Comte de Toulouse, a little ruddy-cheeked lad ~~[illegible]~~ fifteen, flushed up at the detection

"If you please, sire, it is possible that Mademoiselle de Grammont may have wet my coat with her casting bottle when we all played together at Marly yesterday" he stammered "I had not observed it, but if it offends your Majesty —"

"Take it away! Take it away!" cried the King "Pah, it chokes and stifles me! Open the lower casement, Bontems! No, never heed now that he is gone. Monsieur de St Quentin, is this not our shaving morning?"

"Yes, sire, all is ready"

"Then why not proceed? It is three minutes after the accustomed time. To work, sir, and you, Bontems, give word for the grand lever"

It was obvious that the king was not in a very good humour that morning. He darted little quick questioning glances at his brother and his sons, but whatever complaint or sarcasm may have trembled upon his lips was effectually stifled by de St Quentin's minis-trations. With the nonchalance born of long custom the official covered the royal chin with soap, drew the razor swiftly round it, and sponged over the surface with spirits of wine. A nobleman then helped to draw on the king's black velvet haut-de-chausses, a second assisted in arranging them, while a third

drew the night gown over the shoulders, and handed the royal shirt which had been warming before the fire. His diamond buckled shoes, his garters, and his scarlet inner vest were successively fastened by noble courtiers, each keenly jealous of his own privilege, and over the vest were placed the blue ribbon with the cross of the Holy Ghost in diamonds and that of Saint Louis tied with red. To one to whom the sight was new it might have seemed strange to see this little man, listless, passive, with his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the burning logs, while this group of men, each with a historic name, bustled round him, adding a touch here and a touch there like a knot of children with a favourite doll. The black under coat was drawn on, the cravat of rich lace adjusted, the loose over-coat secured, two hand kerchiefs of costly point carried forward upon an enamelled saucer, and thrust by separate officials into each side pocket, the silver and ebony cane laid ready to hand, and the Monarch was ready for the labours of the day.

During the half hour or so which had been occupied in this manner, there had been a constant opening and closing of the chamber door, and a muttering of names from the Captain of the Guard to the Attendant in charge, and from the attendant in charge to the first gentleman of the chamber, ending always in the admission of some new visitor. Each as he entered bowed profoundly three times, as a salute to Majesty, and then attached himself to his own little clique or coterie to gossip in a low voice over the news, the weather and the plans of the day. Gradually the numbers encreased until by the time that the King's frugal first breakfast of bread and twice watered wine had been carried in, the large square chamber was

quite filled with a throng of men, many of whom had helped to make the epoch the most illustrious of French history. Here, close by the king was the harsh but energetic Louvois, all powerful now since the death of his rival Colbert, discussing a question of military organisation with two officers, the one a tall and stately soldier, the other a strange little figure, undersized and mishapen, but bearing the insignia of a Marshal of France, and owning a name which was of evil omen over the Dutch frontier, for Luxembourg was looked upon already as the successor of Condé, even as his companion Vauban was of Turenne. Beside them a small white haired clerical with an austere face, Père La Chaise confessor to the king, was whispering his views upon Jansenism to the portly Bossuet, the eloquent Bishop of Meaux, and to the tall thin young Abbé de Fénélon who listened with a clouded brow, for it was well known that his own opinions were tainted with the heresy in question. There too was Le Brun the painter discussing art in a small circle which contained his fellow workers Verrio and Laguerre, the Architects Blondel and Le Nôtre, and the sculptors Girardon, Puget, Desjardins and Coysevox whose works had done so much to beautify the new palace of the king. Close to the door Racine, with his handsome face wreathed in smiles, was chatting with the poets Boileau and the architect Mansard, the three laughing and jeeting with the freedom which was natural to the favoured servants of the king, the only subjects who might walk unannounced and without ceremony into and out of his chambers.

"What is amiss with him this morning?" asked Boileau, in a whisper nodding his head in the direction of the royal group "I fear that his sleep has not improved his temper"

"

~~[illegible]~~ "He becomes harder and harder to amuse"

"~~[illegible]~~ shaking his head said Racine, ~~[illegible]~~ "I am to be at Madame de Maintenon's room at three to see whether a page or two of the Phèdre may not work a change"

"~~[illegible]~~ said the architect

"~~[illegible]~~, My friend", "do you not think that Madame herself might be a better consoler than your Phèdre."

"Madame is a wonderful woman. She has brains, she has heart, she has tact — she is admirable"

"And yet she has one gift too many"

"And that is"

"Age"

"Pooh, what matter ~~forty~~ her years when she can carry them like thirty. What an eye! What an arm! And besides, my friends, he is not himself a boy any longer"

"Ah, but that is another thing"

"A man's age is an incident, a woman's a calamity"

"Very true. But a young man consults his eye, and an older man his ear. Over forty it is the clever tongue which wins. Under it the pretty face."

"Ah, you rascal! Then you have made up your mind that ~~forty~~ five and forty years with tact will hold the field against nine and thirty with beauty. Well, when your lady has won she will doubtless remember who were the first to pay court to her"

"But I think that you are wrong, Racine"

"Well, we shall see"

"And if you are wrong —"

"Well, what then?"

"Then it may be a little serious for you"

"And why?"

"The Marquise de Montespan has a memory"

"Her influence may soon be nothing more"

"Do not rely too much upon it, my friend. When the Fontanges came up from Provence with her blue eyes and her copper hair it was in every mans mouth that Montespan had had her day. Yet Fontanges is six feet under a church crypt and the Marquise spent two hours with the king ~~yesterday~~ last week. She has won once and may again"

"Ah, but this is a very different rival. This is no slip of a country girl, but the cleverest woman in France."

"Pshaw, Racine, you know our good master well, or you should do, for you seem to have been at his elbow since the days of the Fronde. Is he a man, think you, to be amused for ever by sermons, or to spend his days ~~before a mere~~ at the feet of a lady of ~~fifty~~ that age, watching her at her tapestry work, and fondling her poodle, when all the fairest faces and brightest eyes of France are as thick in his salons as the tulips in a Dutch flower bed. No, no, it will be the Montespan, or if not she some younger beauty."

"My dear Boileau, I say again that her sun is setting. Have you not heard the news?"

"Not a word"

"Her brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, has been refused the entrée"

"Impossible!"

"But it is a fact"

"And when?"

"This very morning"

"From whom had you it?"

"From ~~De~~ de Catinat, the Captain of the Guard. He had his orders to bar the way to him"

"Ha, then the king does indeed mean mischief. That is why his brow is so cloudy this morning then. By my faith if the Marquise has the spirit with which folk credit her

he may find that it was easier to win her than to slight her"

"Aye, the Mortemarts are no easy race to handle"

"Well, heaven send him a safe way out of it! But who is this gentleman? His face is somewhat grimmer than those to which the court is accustomed. Ha, the king catches sight of him and Louvois beckons to him to advance. By my faith he is one who would be more at his ease in a tent than under a painted ceiling."

The stranger who had attracted Racine's attention was a tall thin man, with a high aquiline nose, stern fierce grey eyes peeping out from under tufted brows, and a ~~face~~ countenance so lined and marked by age, care, and stress of weather that it stood out amid the prim courtier faces which surrounded it as an old hawk might in a cage of birds of gay plumage. He was clad in the sombre coloured suit which had become usual at court since the King had put aside frivolity and Fontanges, but the sword which hung from his ~~side~~ waist was no fancy rapier but a good brass hilted blade in a stained leather sheath which showed every sign of having seen hard service. He had been standing near the door, his black feathered beaver in his hand, glancing with a half amused, half disdainful expression at the groups of gossips around him, but at the sign from the minister of war he began to elbow his way forward, pushing aside in no very ceremonious fashion, all who barred his passage.

"It is years since I have seen him, but I remember his face well" said ~~Louis~~ he, turning to his minister, ~~who possessed in a high degree the royal faculty of recognition~~ ~~a high degree the royal faculty of recognition~~ "It is the Count de Frontenac, is it not?"

"Yes, sire" answered Louvois "It is indeed Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, and formerly Governor of Canada"

"We are glad to see you once more at our Lever" said the monarch as the old nobleman stooped his knee and kissed the white hand which was extended to him "I trust that the cold of Canada has not chilled the

warmth of your loyalty."

"Only death itself, Sire, would be cold enough for that"

"Then I trust that it may remain to us for many long years. We would thank you for the care and pains which you have spent upon our province, and if we have recalled you it is chiefly that we would fain hear from your own lips how all things go there. And first as the affairs of God take precedence of those of France how does the conversion of the heathen prosper?"

"We cannot complain, sire. The good fathers, both Jesuits and Récollets have done their best, though indeed they are both rather ready to abandon the affairs of the next world in order to meddle with those of this"

"What say you to that, father?" asked Louis, glancing with a twinkle of the eyes at his Jesuit confessor

"I say, sire, that when the affairs of this world have a bearing upon those of the next it is indeed the duty of a good priest, as of every other good Catholic, to guide them aright"

"That is very true, sire" said de Frontenac, with an angry flush upon his swarthy cheek "But as long as your Majesty did me the honour to entrust those affairs to my own guidance, I would brook no interference in the performance of my duties, whether the meddler were clad in coat or cassock"

"Enough, sir, enough!" said Louis sharply "I had asked you about the missions"

"They prosper, sire. There are Iroquois at the Sault and the Mountain, Hurons at Lorette and Algonquins along the whole river cotes from Tadousac in the East to Sault La Marie, and even the great plains of the Dakotahs, who have all taken the cross as their totem. Marquette has passed down the great river of the west to preach among the Illinois, and

Jesuits have carried the gospel even to the warriors of the Long House in their wigwams at Onondagas".

"I may add, your Majesty" said Père La Chaise "that in bearing the truth there, they have too often left their lives with it"

"Yes, sire, it is very true" cried de Frontenac cordially "Your Majesty has many brave men within his domains, but none braver than these. They have come back up the Richelieu river from the Iroquois villages with their nails gone, their fingers torn out, a cinder where their eye should be, and the scars of the pine splinters as thick upon their bodies as the fleurs-de-lis on yonder curtain. Yet with a month of nursing from the good Ursulines at Montreal, they have used their remaining eye to guide them back to the Indian country once more, where even the dogs have been frightened at their haggled faces and twisted limbs"

"And you have suffered this?" cried Louis hotly "You allowed these infamous assassins to live"

"I have asked for troops, sire"

"And I have sent some."

"One regiment"

"The Carignan-Saliére. I have no better in my service."

"But more is needed, sire"

"There are the Canadians themselves. Have you not a militia. Could you not raise force enough to punish these rascally murderers of God's priests. I had always understood that you were a soldier"

De Frontenac's eyes flashed, and a quick answer seemed for an instant to tremble upon his lips, but with an effort the fiery old man restrained himself. "Your Majesty will learn best whether I am a soldier or not" said he "by asking those who have seen me at

Seneffe, Mulhausen, Salzbach, and half a score of other places where I have had the honour of upholding your Majesty's cause."

"Your services have not been forgotten"

"It is just because I am a soldier and have seen something of war that I know how hard it is to penetrate into a country much larger than the Lowlands, all thick with forest and ~~deep with~~ bog, ~~and~~ with a savage lurking behind every tree who, if he has not learned to step in time or to form line, can atleast bring down the running Caribos at two hundred paces, and travel three leagues to your one. And then when you have atleast reached their villages, and burned their empty wigwams and a few acres of maize fields what the better are you then? You can ~~back~~ but travel back again to your own land with a cloud of unseen men lurking behind you, and a scalp-yell for every straggler. You are a soldier yourself, sire. I ask you if such a war is an easy task for a handful of soldiers with a few censitaires straight from the plough, and of coureurs-des-bois whose hearts all the time are with their traps and their beaver skins"

"No, no, I am sorry if I spoke too hastily" said Louis "We shall look into the matter at our Council"

"Then it warms my heart to hear you say so" cried the old governor "~~for what is there which you have ever taken in hand which you have failed to do!~~ There will be joy down the long St Lawrence in white hearts and in red when it is known that their great father over the waters has turned his mind towards them"

"And yet you must not look for too much ~~[illegible]~~ for Canada has been a heavy cost to us, and we have many calls ~~[illegible]~~ in Europe"

"Ah, sire, I would that you could see that great land. When your Majesty has won a campaign over

here what may come of it? Glory, a few miles of land, Luxembourg, Strasburg, one more city in the kingdom. But over there with a tenth of the cost and a hundred part of the force there is a world ready to your hand. It is so vast, sire, so rich, so beautiful! Where are there such hills, such forests, such rivers! And it is all for us if we will but take it. Who is there to stand in our way? A few nations of scattered Indians, and a thin strip of English farmers and fishermen. Turn your thoughts there, Sire, and in a few years you would be able to stand upon your citadel at Quebec and to say there is one great Empire here from the snows of the north to the warm southern gulf, and from the waves of the ocean to the great plains beyond ~~La Salle's~~ Marquette's river, and the name of this Empire is France, and her king is Louis, and her flag is the fleurs-de-lis."

Louis' cheek had flushed at this ambitious picture and he had leaned forward in his chair with flashing eyes, but he sank back again as the Governor concluded.

"On my word, Count" said he "You have caught something of this gift of Indian eloquence of which we have heard. But about these English folk. They are huguenots are they not?"

"For the most part. Especially in the north"

"Then it might be a service to holy church to send them packing: ~~Know sure that so pious a monarch as our sovereign in James would scarce regret such heretic subjects, since he has already more than he can manage at home.~~ They have a city there, I am told, New-New - how do they call it?"

"New York, sire. They took it from the Dutch"

"Ah, New York. And have I not heard of another, Bos- Bos-"

"Boston, sire"

"That is the name. The harbours might be of service to us. Tell me now, Frontenac," lowering his voice so that his words might be audible only to the Count, Louvois, and the royal circle "~~How~~ What force would you need to clear these people out? One regiment, two regiments, and perhaps a frigate or two"

But the ex-governor shook his grizzled head. "You do not know them, sire" said he "They are a ~~hard~~ stern folk these. We in Canada with all your gracious help have found it hard to hold our own. Yet these men have had no help, but only hindrance, with cold and disease, and barren lands, and Indian wars but they have thriven and multiplied until the woods thin away in front of them like ice in the sun, and their church bells are heard where but yesterday the wolves were howling. They are peaceful folk, and slow to war but when they have set their hands to it though they may be slack to begin, they are slacker still to cease. To put New England into your Majesty's hands I would ask fifteen thousand of your best troops and twenty ships of the line"

Louis sprang impatiently from his chair, and caught up his cane "I wish" said he "that you would imitate these people who seem to you to be so formidable, in their excellent habit of doing things for themselves. The matter may stand until our council. Reverend father, it has struck the hour of chapel, and all else may wait until we have paid our duties to heaven." Taking a missal from the hands of an attendant he walked as fast as his very high heels would permit him towards the door, the court forming a lane through which he might pass, and then closing up behind to follow him in order of precedence.

Chapter III
The Holding of the door

Whilst Louis had been affording his court that which he had openly stated to be the highest of human pleasures, the sight of the royal face, the young officer of the Guard outside had been very busy passing on the titles of the numerous applicants for admission, and exchanging usually a smile or a few words of greeting with them, for his frank handsome face was a well known one at the court. With his merry eyes and his brisk bearing he looked like a man who was on good terms with Fortune. Indeed he had good cause to be so for she had used him well. Three years ago he had been an unknown subaltern busy fighting with Algonquins and Iroquois in the wilds of Canada. An exchange had brought him back to France and into the Regiment of Picardy, but the lucky chance of having seized the bridle of the king's horse one winter's day in Fontainebleau when the creature was plunging within a few yards of a deep gravel pit, had done for him what ten campaigns might have failed to accomplish. Now as a trusted officer of the king's guard, young, gallant and popular his lot was indeed an enviable one. And yet with the strange perversity of human nature he was already surfeited with the dull, if magnificent, routine of the King's household, and looking back with regret to the rougher and freer days of his early service. Even there, at the royal door, his mind had turned away from the frescoed passage and the groups of courtiers to the wild ravines and foaming rivers of the west, when suddenly his eyes lit upon a face which he had last seen among those very scenes.

"Ah, Monsieur de Frontenac" he cried "You cannot have forgotten me."

"What! De Catinat! Ah, this a joy indeed to

see a face from over the water! But there is a long step between a subaltern in the Carignan and a Captain in the Guards. You have risen rapidly"

"Yes, and yet I may be none the happier for it. There are times when I would give it all to be dancing down the La Chine rapids in a birch canoe, or to see the red and the yellow on those hillsides once more at the fall of the leaf."

"Aye" sighed De Frontenac "You know that my fortunes have sunk as yours have risen. I have been recalled and De la Barre is in my place. But there will be a storm there which such a man as he can never stand against. With the Iroquois all dancing the scalp dance, and ~~[illegible]~~ Dongan behind them in New York to whoop them on they will need me, and they will find me waiting when they send. I will see the king now, and try ~~see~~ if I cannot rouse him to play the great monarch there as well as here. Had I but his power in my hands I ~~would~~ should change the world's history"

"Hush! No treason to the Captain of the Guards!" cried De Catinat, laughing, while the stern old soldier strode past him into the king's presence.

A gentleman very richly dressed in black and silver had come up during this short conversation, and advanced, as the door opened, with the assured air of a man whose rights are beyond dispute. Captain De Catinat however took a quick step forward and barred him off from the door.

"I am very sorry, Monsieur de Vivonne" said he "but you are forbidden the presence"

"Forbidden the presence! I! You are mad" He stepped back with gray face and staring eyes, one shaking hand half raised in protest

"I assure you that it is his order"

"But it is incredible. It is a mistake"

"Very possibly"

"Then you will let me past!"

"My orders leave me no discretion"

"If I could have one word with the king"

"Unfortunately, Monsieur, it is impossible"

"Only one word!"

"It really does not rest with me, Monsieur"

The angry nobleman stamped his foot and stared at the door as though he had some thoughts of forcing a passage. Then turning on his heel he hastened away down the corridor with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

"There, now" grumbled De Catinat to himself, as he pulled at his thick dark moustache "He is off to make some fresh mischief. I'll have his sister here presently, as like as not, and ~~I'll have~~ a pleasant little choice between breaking my orders and making an enemy of her for life. I'd rather hold Fort Richelieu against the Iroquois than the king's door against an angry ~~lady~~ woman. ~~On my word I am getting very weary of standing at the head of these big Switzers, who look more like lacqueys than soldiers, and I wish our Master would give us the word to cross the Rhine once more, or send us north to see if we could root old Mynheer out from among his bags.~~ By my faith, here is a lady, as I feared! Ah, Heaven be praised it is a friend and not a foe. Good morning, Mademoiselle Nanon"

"Good morning, Captain de Catinat!" The newcomer was a tall graceful brunette, her fresh face and sparkling black eyes the brighter in contrast with her plain dress ~~of black taffeta~~.

"I am on guard, you see! I cannot talk

with you"

"I cannot remember having asked Monsieur to talk with me"

"Ah, but you must not pout in that pretty way or else I cannot help talking to you" whispered the Captain "What is this in your hand then?"

"A note from Madame de Maintenon to the king. You will hand it to him will you not?"

"Certainly Mademoiselle. And how is Madame your mistress ~~this morning~~?"

"Oh her director has been with her all morning, and his talk is very very good, but it is also very very sad. We are not very cheerful when Monsieur Godet has been to see us. But I forgot Monsieur is a Huguenot and knows nothing of directors"

"Oh, but I ~~know nothing of such things~~ do not trouble about such differences. I let the Sorbonne and Geneva fight it out between them. Yet a man must stand by his family, you know"

"Ah, if Monsieur could talk to Madame de Maintenon a little. She would convert him"

"I had rather talk to Mademoiselle Nanon, but if—"

"Oh!" There was an exclamation, a whisk of dark skirts and the soubrette had disappeared down a side passage. ~~Down~~ along the broad lighted corridor was gliding a very stately and beautiful lady, tall, graceful and exceedingly haughty. She was richly clad in a bodice of gold coloured camlet and a skirt of gray silk trimmed with gold and silver lace. A handkerchief of priceless Genoa point half hid and half revealed her beautiful throat, and was fastened in front by a cluster of pearls, while a rope of the same, each one worth a bourgeois' income, was coiled in and out through her ~~beautiful and~~ luxuriant hair. The lady was past her first

youth, it is true, but the magnificent curves of her queenly figure, the purity of her complexion, the brightness of her deep-lashed ~~gray~~ blue eyes, and the clear regularity of her features enabled her still to claim to be the most handsome as well as the most sharp tongued woman in the Court of France. So beautiful was her bearing, the carriage of her dainty head upon her proud white neck, and the sweep of her stately walk that the young officer's fears were over-powered in his admiration, and he found it hard, as he raised his hand in salute, to retain the firm countenance which his duties demanded.

"Ah, it is Captain de Catinat" said Madame de Montespan, with a smile which was more embarassing to him than any frown could have been.

"Your humble servant, Marquise"

"I am fortunate in finding a friend here, for there has been some ridiculous mistake this morning"

"I am concerned to hear it"

"It was about my brother, Monsieur de Vivonne. It is almost too laughable to mention, but he was actually refused admission to the lever."

"It was my misfortune to have to refuse him, Madame"

"You, Captain de Catinat! And by what right?" She had drawn up her superb figure and her large ~~gray~~ blue eyes were blazing with indignant astonishment.

"The King's order, Madame"

"The King! Is it likely that the king would cast a public slight upon my family! From whom had you this preposterous order?"

"Direct from the king through Bontems"

"Absurd! Do you think that the king would venture to exclude a Mortemart through the mouth of a valet! You have been dreaming, Captain!"

"I trust that it may prove so, Madame"

"But such dreams are not very fortunate to the dreamer. Go, tell the king that I am here and would have a word with him"

"Impossible, Madame"

"And why?"

"I have been forbidden to carry a message"

"To carry any message?"

"Any from you, Madame."

"Come, Captain, you improve! It only needed this ~~[illegible]~~ insult to make the thing complete. You may carry a message to the king from any adventuress, from any decayed governess — she laughed shrilly at her description of her rival — "but none from Françoise de Mortemart, Marquise de Montespan"

"Such are my orders, Madame. It pains me deeply to be compelled to carry them out"

"You may spare your protestations, Captain. You may yet find that you have every reason to be deeply pained. For the last time do you refuse to carry my message to the king?"

"I must, Madame"

"Then I carry it myself" She sprang forward at the door but he slipped in front of her with outstretched arms "For God's sake consider yourself, Madame", he entreated, "Other eyes are upon you"

"Pah! Canaille!" She glanced at the knot of Swilzers, whose sergeant had drawn them off a few paces, but who stood open-eyed, staring at the scene. "I tell you that I will see the king"

"No lady has ever been at the morning lever"

"Then I shall be the first"

"You will ruin me if you pass"

"And none the less I shall do so"

The matter looked serious. De Catinat was a man of resource, but for once he was at his wit's end. Madame de Montespan's resolution, as it was called in her presence, or effrontery as it was termed behind her back, was proverbial.

If she attempted to force her way would he venture to use violence upon one who only yesterday had held the fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand, and who, with her beauty, her wit, and her energy might very well be in the same position tomorrow. If she passed him then his future was ruined with the king, who never brooked the smallest deviation from his orders. On the other hand if he thrust her back he did that which could never be forgiven and which would entail some deadly vengeance should she return to power. It was an unpleasant dilemma. But a happy thought flashed into his mind at the very moment when she with clenched hand and flashing eyes was on the point of making a fresh attempt to pass him.

"If Madame would deign to wait" said he soothingly "The king will be on his way to the chapel in an instant"

"It is not yet time"

"I think the hour has just gone"

"And why should I wait like a lackey?"

"It is but a moment, Madame"

"No, I shall not wait" She took a step forward towards the door

But the Guardsman's quick ear had caught the sound of moving feet from within, and he knew that he was master of the situation.

"I will take Madame's message" said he

"Ah! You have recovered your senses. Go, tell the king that I wish to speak with him"

He must gain a little time yet. "Shall I say it through the Lord in waiting?"

"No. Yourself"

"Publicly?"

"No, no, for his private ear"

"Shall I give a reason for your request?"

"Oh, you madden me! Say what I have told you, and at once."

But the young officer's dilemma was happily over. At that instant the double doors were swung open, and Louis ~~stood~~ appeared in the opening, strutting forward on his high-heeled shoes, his stick tapping, his broad skirts flapping, and his courtiers spreading out behind him. He stopped as he came out and turned to the Captain of the Guards.

"You have a note for me?"

"Yes, sire"

The monarch slipped it into the pocket of his scarlet underwest and was advancing once more when his eyes fell upon Madame de Montespan standing very stiff and erect in the middle of the passage. A dark flush of anger shot to his brow, and he walked swiftly past her without a word, but she turned and kept pace with him down the corridor.

"I had not expected this honour, madame" said he

"Nor had I expected this insult, sire"

"An insult, Madame! You forget yourself"

"No, tis you who have forgotten me, sire"

"You intrude upon me"

"I wished to hear my fate from your own lips", she whispered "I can bear to be struck myself, sire, even by him who has my heart. But it is hard to hear that one's brother has been wounded through the mouths of valets and huguenots soldiers, for no fault save that his sister has loved too fondly"

"It is no time to speak of such things"

"When can I see you then, sire?"

"In your chamber"

"At what hour?"

"At four"

"Then I shall trouble your Majesty no further" She swept him one of the graceful curtseys for which she was

famous, and ~~swept~~ turned away down a side passage with triumph shining in her eyes. Her beauty and her spirit had never failed her yet and now that she had the monarch's promise of an interview she never doubted that she could do as she had done before and win back the heart of the man however much against the conscience of the king.

Chapter IV

The father of his people.

Louis had walked on to his devotions in no very charitable frame of mind, as was easily to be seen from his clouded brow and compressed lips. He knew his late favourite well, her impulsiveness, her audacity, her lack of all restraint when thwarted or opposed. She was capable of making a hideous scandal, of turning against him that bitter tongue which had so often made him laugh at the expense of others, perhaps even of making some public exposure which would leave him the butt and gossip of Europe. He shuddered at the thought. At all costs such a catastrophe must be averted. And yet how could he cut the tie which bound them. He had broken other such bonds as these, but the gentle La Vallière had shrunk into a convent at the very first glance which had told her of waning love. That was true affection. But this woman would struggle hard, fight to the bitter end, before she would quit the position which was so dear to her. She spoke of her wrongs. What were her wrongs? In his intense selfishness, nurtured by the eternal flattery which was the very air he breathed, he could not see that the fifteen years of her life which he had absorbed, or the husband which he had supplanted, gave her any claim upon him. In his view he had raised her to the highest position which a subject could occupy. Now he was weary of her and it was her duty to retire with resignation, nay even with gratitude for past favours. She should have a pension, and the children should be cared for. What could a reasonable woman ask for more?

And then his motives for discarding her were so excellent. He turned them over in his mind as he knelt listening to the Archbishop of Paris reciting the mass, and the more he thought the more he approved. His conception of the Deity was of a larger Louis, and of Heaven

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as a more gorgeous Versailles. If he exacted obedience from his twenty million then he must show it also to the One who had a right to demand it of him. On the whole his conscience acquitted him. But in this one matter he had been lax. From the first coming of his gentle and forgiving young wife from Spain he had never once permitted her to be without a rival. Now that she was dead the matter was no better. One favourite had succeeded another, and if De Montespan had held her own so long it was rather from her own audacity than from his affection. But now Father La Chaise and Bossuet were ever reminding him that he had topped the summit of his life, and was already upon that downward path which leads to the grave. His wild outburst over the unhappy Fontanges had represented the last flicker of his passions. The time had ~~now~~ come for gravity and for calm, neither of which ~~were~~ was to be ~~found~~ expected in the company of Madame de Montespan.

But he had found out where they were to be ~~found~~ enjoyed. From the day when De Montespan had introduced the stately and silent widow as a governess for his children he had found a never failing and ever increasing pleasure in her society. In the early days of her coming he had sat for hours in the rooms of his favourite watching the tact and sweetness of temper with which her dependant controlled the mutinous spirits of the petulant young Duc du Maine, and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse. He had been there nominally for the purpose of ~~[illegible]~~ superintending the teaching, but he had confined himself to admiring the teacher. And then in time he too had been drawn into the attraction of that strong sweet nature, and had found himself consulting her upon points of conduct, and acting upon her advice with a docility which he had never shown before to minister or mistress. For a time he had thought that her piety and her talk of

principle might be a mere mask, for he was accustomed to hypocrisy all round him. It was surely unlikely that a woman who was still beautiful, with as bright an eye, and as graceful a figure as any in his Court, could after a life spent in the gayest circles preserve the spirit of a nun. But on this point he was soon undeceived, for when his own language had become warmer than that of friendship he had been met by an icineas of manner and a brevity of speech which had shown him that there was one woman atleast in his dominions who had a higher respect for herself than for him. And perhaps it was better so. The placid pleasures of friendship were very soothing after the storms of passion. To sit in her room every afternoon, to listen to talk which was not tainted with flattery, and to hear opinions which were not framed to please his ear, were the occupations now of his happiest hours. And then her influence over him was all so good! She spoke of his kingly duties, of his example to his subjects, of his preparation for the world beyond, and of the need for an effort to snap the guilty ties which he had formed. She was as good as a confessor — a confessor with a lovely face and a perfect arm.

And now he knew that the time had come when he must choose between her and De Montespan. Their influences were antagonistic. They could not continue together. He stood between virtue and vice and he must choose. Vice was very attractive too, very comely, very witty, and holding him by that chain of custom which is so hard to shake off. There were hours when his nature swayed strongly over to that side, and when he was tempted to fall back into his old life. But Bossuet and Père La Chaise were ever at his elbows to whisper encouragement, and above all there was Madame de Maintenon to remind him

of what was due to his position and to his six and forty years. Now at last he had braced himself for a supreme effort. There was no safety for him while his old favourite was at court. He knew himself too well to have any faith in a lasting change so long as she was there ever waiting for his moment of weakness. She must be persuaded to leave Versailles, if, without a scandal, it could be done. He would be firm when he met her in the afternoon, and make her understand once for all that her reign was for ever over.

Such were the thoughts which ran through the King's head as he bent over the rich crimson cushion which topped his prie-dieu of carved oak. He knelt in his own enclosure to the right of the altar with his guards and his immediate household around him, while the court, ladies and cavaliers, filled the chapel. Piety was a fashion now, like dark overcoats and lace cravats, and no courtier was so worldly minded as not to have had a touch of grace since the king had taken to religion. Yet they looked very bored, these soldiers and seigneurs, yawning and blinking over the missals, while some who seemed more intent upon their devotions were really dipping into the latest romance of Scudéry or Calprenedi, cunningly bound up in a sombre cover. The ladies indeed were more devout, and were determined that all should see it, for each had lit a tiny taper which she held in front of her on the plea of lighting up her missal, but really that her face might be visible to the king and inform him that hers was a kindred spirit. A few there may have been, here and there, whose prayer rose from their hearts, and who were there of their own free will, but the policy of Louis had changed his noblemen into courtiers, and his men of the world into hypocrites until the whole court was like one gigantic mirror which reflected his own likeness a hundred fold.

It was the habit of the king as he walked back from the chapel to receive ~~any~~ petitions or listen to any tales of wrong which his subjects might ~~a~~ bring to him. His way, as he returned to his rooms lay partly across an open space and here it was that the suppliants were wont to assemble. On this particular morning there ~~were~~ but two or three, a Parisian who conceived himself injured by the provost of his Guild, a peasant whose cow had been torn by a huntsman's dog, and a farmer who had had hard usage from his feudal lord. A few questions and then a hurried order to his secretary disposed of each case, for if Louis were a tyrant himself, he had atleast the merit that he insisted upon being the only one within his kingdom. He was about to resume his way again when an elderly man, ~~and~~ clad in the garb of a respectable citizen, and with a strong deeplined face which marked him as a man of character, darted forward and threw himself down upon one knee in front of the monarch.

"Justice, sire, Justice!" he cried

"What is this then?" asked Louis "Who are you and what is it that you want"

"I am a citizen of Paris, and I have been cruelly wronged"

"You seem a very worthy person. If you have indeed been wronged you shall have redress. What have you to complain of"

"Twenty of the Blue dragoons of Languedoc are quartered in my house with Captain Dalbert at their head. They have devoured my food, ~~maulted my daughter~~, stolen my property and beaten my servants, yet the magistrates will give me no redress"

"On my life Justice seems to be administered in a strange fashion in our city of Paris!" exclaimed the king wrathfully.

"It's indeed a shameful case" said Bossuet

"And yet there may be a very good reason for it" suggested Père La Chaise "I would suggest that your Majesty should ask this man his name, his business, and why it was that the dragoons were quartered upon him"

"You hear the Reverend father's question"

"My name, sire, is Catinat, by trade I am a merchant in cloth, and I am treated in this fashion because I am of the reformed church."

"I thought as much!" cried the Confessor.

"That alters matters" said Bossuet

The king shook his head and his brow darkened. "You have only yourself to thank then. The remedy is in your hands"

"And how, sire"

"By embracing the only true faith"

"I am already a member of it, sire"

The king stamped his foot angrily "I can see that you are a very insolent heretic" said he "There is but one church in France and that is my church. If you are outside that you cannot look to me for aid"

"My creed is that of my father, sire, and of my grandfather"

"If they have sinned it is no reason why you should. My own grandfather erred also before his eyes were opened"

"But he nobly atoned for his error" murmured the Jesuit.

"Then you will not help me, sire?"

"You must first help yourself".

The old huguenot stood up with a gesture of despair, while the king continued on his way, the two ecclesiastics on either side of him murmuring their approval into his ears.

"You have done nobly, sire!"

"You are truly the first son of the church!"

"You are the worthy successor of Saint Louis!"

But the king bore the face of a man who was not absolutely satisfied with his own action.

"You do not think then that these people have too hard a measure" said he.

"Too hard. Nay, your Majesty errs on the side of mercy"

"I hear that they are leaving my kingdom in great numbers"

"And surely it is better so, sire, for what blessing can come upon a country which has such stubborn infidels within it's boundaries"

"Those who are traitors to God can scarce be loyal to the king" remarked Bossuet "Your Majesty's power would be greater if there were no temple, as they call their dens of heresy, within your dominions"

"My grandfather has promised them protection. They are shielded, as you well know, by the Edict which he gave at Nantes"

"But it lies with your Majesty to undo the mischief that has been done"

"And how?"

"By recalling the edict"

"And driving into the open arms of my enemies two millions of my best artisans and of my bravest servants. No, no, father, I have, I trust, every zeal for Mother church, but there is some truth in what De Frontenac said this morning of the evil which comes from mixing the affairs of this world with those of the next. How say you, Louvois?"

"With all respect to the church, sire, I would say that the devil has given these men such cunning of hand and of brain, that they are the best workers and

traders in your Majesty's kingdom. I know not how the state coffers are to be filled if such taxpayers go from among us. Already many have left the country and taken their trades with them. If all were to go it would be worse for us than a lost campaign"

"But" remarked Bossuet "if it were once known that the king's will had been expressed your Majesty may rest assured that even the worst of his subjects bear him such love that they would hasten to come within the pale of holy church. As long as the edict stands it seems to them that the king is luke warm and that they may abide in their error."

The king shook his head. "They have always been stubborn folk" said he

"Perhaps" remarked Louvois, glancing maliciously at Bossuet "were the Bishops of France to make an offering to the state of the treasures of their sees, we might then do without these huguenot taxes"

"All that the church has is at the king's service" answered Bossuet curtly

"The kingdom is mine and all that is in it" remarked Louis, as they entered the Grand Salon in which the Court assembled after chapel. "Yet, I trust that it may be long before I have to claim the wealth of the Church"

"We trust so, sire" echoed the ecclesiastics

"But we may reserve such topics for our council chamber. Where is Mansard? I must see his plans for the new wing at Marly" He crossed to a side table and was buried in an instant in his favourite pursuit, inspecting the gigantic plans of the great architect and inquiring eagerly as to the progress of the work.

"I think" said Pere La Chaise, drawing Bossuet aside "that your Grace has made some impression upon the king's mind"

"With your powerful assistance, Father"

"Oh, you may rest assured that I shall lose no opportunity of pushing on the good work"

"If you take it in hand it is done"

"But there is another who has more weight than I"

"The favourite, De Montespan?"

"No, no. Her day is gone. It is Madame de Maintenon.

"I hear that she is very devout"

"Very. But she has no love for my order. She is a Sulpitian. Yet we may all work to one end. Now if you were to speak to her, your grace"

"With all my heart"

"Show her how good a service it would be could she bring about the banishment of the huguenots"

"I shall do so"

"And offer her in return that we will promote —" He bent forward and whispered into the Prelate's ear.

"What! He would not do it!"

"And why? The Queen is dead"

"The widow of the poet Scarron!"

"She is of good birth. Her grandfather and his were dear friends"

"It is impossible!"

"But I know his heart and I say it is possible"

"You certainly know his heart, father, if any can. But such a thought had never entered my mind"

"Then let it enter and remain there. If she will serve the church, the church will serve her. But the king beckons and I must go" The thin dark figure hastened off through the throng of Courtiers, and the great Bishop of Meaux remained standing with his chin upon his breast, sunk in reflection.

By this time all the Court was assembled in the Grand Salon, and the huge room was gay from end

to end with the silks, the velvets and the brocades of the ladies, the glitter of jewels, the flirt of painted fans, and the sweep of plume or aigrette. The grays, blacks and browns of the mens coats toned down the mass of colour, for all must be dark when the king was dark, and only the blues of the Officers uniforms, and the pearl and gray of the Musketeers of the guard remained to call back those early days of the reign when the men had vied with the women in the costliness and brilliancy of their wardrobes. And if dresses had changed manners had done so even more. The old levity and the old passions lay doubtless very near the surface, but grave faces and serious talk was the fashion of the hour. It was no longer the lucky coup at the lansquenet table, the last comedy of Molière, or the new opera of Lully about which they gossipped, but it was on the evils of Jansenism, on the expulsion of Arnauld from the Sorbonne, on the insolence of Pascal, or on the comparative merits of two such popular preachers as Bourdaloue and Masillon. So under a radiant ceiling and over a many coloured floor, surrounded by immortal paintings, set thickly in gold and ornament, there moved all these nobles and ladies of France, all moulding themselves upon the one little dark figure in their midst, who was himself so ~~little~~ far from being his own master that he hung balanced even now between two rival women, who were playing a game in which the future of France and his own destiny were the stakes.

Chap V

~~A Friend in need~~

Children of Belial

The elderly Huguenot had stood silent, after his repulse by the king, with his eyes cast moodily downwards, and a face in which doubt, sorrow and anger contended for the mastery. He was a very large gaunt man, rawboned and haggard, with a wide forehead, a great fleshy nose, and a powerful chin which spoke of a resolute nature. He wore neither wig nor powder, but nature had put her own silvering upon his thick grizzled locks, and the thousand puckers which clustered round the edges of his eyes, or drew at the corners of his mouth gave a set gravity to his face which needed no device of the barber to encrease it. Yet, in spite of his mature years, the swift anger with which he had sprung up when the king refused his plaint, and the keen fiery glance which he had shot ~~after~~ at the royal court as they filed past him with many a scornful smile and whispered jibe at his expense, all showed that he had still preserved ~~much~~ something of the strength and of the spirit of his youth. He was dressed, as became his rank, plainly and yet well in a sad coloured brown kersey coat with silver plated buttons, knee breeches of the same, and white woollen stockings, ending in broad toed black leather shoes cut across with a great steel buckle. In ~~his~~ one hand he carried his low felt hat, trimmed with gold edging, and in the other a little cylinder of paper ~~which~~ containing a recital of his wrongs which he had hoped to leave in the ~~hands~~ hands of the king's secretary.

His doubts as to what his next step should be were soon resolved for him in a very summary fashion. These were days when of the Huguenot was not absolutely forbidden in France he was atleast looked upon as a man who existed upon sufferance, and who was unshielded by the laws which protected his Catholic fellow subjects. For

twenty years the stringency of the ~~measures which had been taken against him~~ persecution had encreased until there was no weapon which bigotry could employ, short of absolute expulsion, which had not been turned against him. He was impeded in his business, elbowed out of all public employment, his house filled with troops, his children encouraged to rebel against him, and all redress refused him for the insults and assaults to which he was subjected. Every rascal who wished to gratify his personal spite, or to gain favour with his bigotted superiors, might do his worst upon him without fear of the law. Yet, in spite of all, these men clung to the land which disowned them and, full of the ~~deep~~ love for their native soil which lies so deep in a Frenchman's heart, preferred insult and contumely at home to the welcome which would await them beyond the seas. Already however the shadow of those days was falling upon them when the choice should no longer be their's.

Two of the king's big blue coated guardsmen were on duty at that side of the palace, and had been witnesses to his unsuccessful appeal. Now they tramped across together to where he was standing and broke brutally into the current of his thoughts.

"Now, hymn books" said one gruffly "Get off again about your business"

"You're not a very pretty ornament to the king's pathway" cried the other with a hideous oath "Who are you to turn up your nose at the king's religion, curse you!"

The old Huguenot shot a glance of anger and contempt at them, and was turning to go, when one of them thrust at his ribs with the buttend of his halbert.

"Take that, you dog!" he cried "Would

you dare to look like that at the King's guard"

"Children of Belial!" cried the old man, with his hand pressed to his side "Were I twenty years younger you would not have dared to use me so"

"Ha, you would still spit your venom, would you? That is enough, André! He has threatened the King's Guard. Let us seize him and drag him to the Guard room."

The two ~~ba~~ soldiers dropped their halberts and rushed upon the old man, but, tall and strong as they were, they found it no easy matter to secure him. With his long sinewy arms and his ~~lean~~ wiry frame he shook himself clear of them again, and again, and it was only when his breath had failed him that the two, torn and panting, were able to twist round his wrists and so secure him. They had hardly won their pitiful victory however before a stern voice and a sword flashing before their eyes, compelled them to release their prisoner once more.

It was Captain de Catinat, who, his morning duties over, had strolled out on to the terrace and had come upon this sudden scene of outrage. At the sight of the old man's face he gave a violent start, and, drawing his sword, had rushed forward with such fury that the two guardsmen not only dropped their victim, but staggering back from the threatening sword point one of them slipped and the other rolled over him, a revolving mass of blue coat and white ~~kersey~~ kersey.

"Villains" roared de Catinat "What is the meaning of this?"

The two had stumbled on to their feet again, very shamefaced and ruffled.

"If you please, Captain" said one, saluting "This is a Huguenot who abused the royal guard"

"His petition had been rejected by the King, Captain, and yet he refused to go"

De Catinat was white with fury. "And so when a French Citizen has come to have a word with the great master of his country, he must be harassed by two Swiss dogs like you" he cried "By my faith we shall soon see about that!" He drew a little silver whistle from his pocket and at the shrill summons an old Sergeant and half a dozen soldiers came running from the Guardroom.

"Your names?" asked the Captain sternly

"André Meunier"

"And yours?"

"Nicholas Klopper"

"Sergeant you will arrest these men, Meunier and Klopper"

"Certainly, Captain" said the Sergeant, a dark puzzled old soldier of Condé and Turenne

"See that they are tried to day"

"And on what charge, Captain?"

"For assaulting and aged and respected Citizen who had come on business to the king"

"He was a Huguenot on his own confession" cried the culprits both together.

"Hum!" The Sergeant pulled doubtfully at his long moustache "Shall we put the charge in that form, Captain. Just as the Captain pleases" He gave a little shrug of his epaulletted shoulders to signify his doubt whether any good could arise from it.

"No" said de Catinat with a sudden happy thought "I charge them with laying their halberts down while on duty, and with having their uniforms dirty and disarranged"

"That is better" answered the Sergeant, with the freedom of a privileged veteran "Thunder of God, but

you have disgraced the Guards! An hour on the wooden horse with a musket at either foot may teach you that halberts were made for a soldier's hand and not for the king's grassplot. Seize them! Attention! Right half turn! March!" And away went the little clump of Guardsmen with the Sergeant in the rear. The Huguenot had stood in the background, grave and composed, without any sign of exultation, during this sudden reversal of fortune, but when the soldiers were gone he and the young officer turned warmly upon each other.

"Amory! I had not hoped to see you!"

"Nor I you, Uncle. What in the name of wonder brings you to ~~the~~ Versailles"

"My wrongs, Amory. The hand of the wicked is heavy upon us, and whom can we turn to save only the king"

The young officer shook his head "The king is at heart a good man" said he "But he can only see the world through the glasses which are held before him. You have nothing to hope from him"

"He spurned me from his presence"

"Did he ask you your name?"

"He did and I gave it"

The young Guardsman whistled. "Let us walk to the gate" said he "By my faith if my kinsmen are to come and bandy arguments with the king it may not be long before my company finds itself without it's captain"

"~~Degree my name as Intend. Since we have been in business we have dropped the 'de', which my brother, your father, might as a soldier preserve~~." The king would not couple us together. But indeed, nephew, it is strange to me how you can live in this house of Baal, and yet bow down to no false gods"

"I keep my beliefs in my own heart"

The older man shook his head gravely. "Your ways lie along a very narrow path" said he "with temptation and danger ever at your feet. It is hard for you to walk with the Lord, Amory, and yet go hand-in-hand with the persecutors of his people"

"Tut, Uncle" said the young man impatiently "I am a soldier of the king's and I am ~~constant~~ willing to let the black gown and the white surplice settle these matters between them. Let me live in honour and die in my duty and I am content to wait to know the rest"

"Content too to live in palaces and eat from fine linen" said the Huguenot bitterly "when the hands of the wicked are heavy upon your kinsfolk, and there is a breaking of phials, and a pouring forth of tribulation, and a wailing and a weeping throughout the land"

"What is amiss then?" asked the young soldier who was somewhat mystified by the scriptural language in use among the French Calvinists of the day.

"Twenty men of Moab have been quartered upon me with one Dalbert their Captain who has long been a scourge to Israel"

"~~Captain Claude Dalbert of the Languedoc Blues~~"

"~~Even so. You know him~~?"

"I have already some small score to settle with him Captain Claude Dalbert of the Languedoc dragoons"

"Aye, and the scattered remnant has also a score against this murderous Doeg and self seeking Ziphite."

"What has he done then?"

"His men are over my house like moths in a cloth-bale. No place is free from them. He sits in the room which should be mine, his great boots on my Spanish leather chairs, his pipe in his mouth, his wine pot at his elbow, and his talk a hissing and an abomination. He has beaten old Pierre of the warehouse"

"Ha!"

"And thrust me into the cellar."

"Ha!"

"Because I had dragged him back when in his drunken love he would have thrown his arms about your cousin Adèle"

"Oh!" The young man's colour had been rising and his brows knitting at each successive charge, but at this last his anger boiled over and he hurried forward with fury in his face, dragging his elderly companion by the elbow. They had been passing through one of those winding paths, bordered by high ~~and~~ hedges, which thinned away every here and there to give a glimpse of some prowling faun or weary nymph who slumbered in marble amid the foliage. The few courtiers who met them gazed with surprise at so ill assorted a pair of companions, but the young soldier was too full of his own ~~thoughts~~ plans to waste a thought upon their speculations. Still hurrying on he followed a crescent path which led past a dozen stone dolphins shooting water out of their mouths over a group of Tritons, and so ~~past~~ through an avenue of ~~the~~ great trees which looked as if they had grown there for centuries and yet had in truth been carried over that very year by incredible labour from Saint Germain and Fontainebleau. Beyond this point a small gate leads out of the grounds and it was through ~~this~~ it that the two passed, the elder man puffing and panting with this unusual haste.

"How did you come, Uncle?"

"In a calèche." ~~Thereupon~~

"Where is it?"

"That ~~is out~~ it is, beyond the auberge"

"Come! Let us make for it"

"But you, Amary! Are you coming!"

"My faith, it is time that I came from what you tell me. There is room for a man with a sword at his side in this establishment of yours."

"But what would you do?"

"I would have a word with this Captain Dalbert"

"Then I have wronged you, nephew, when I said even now that you were not whole-hearted towards Israel"

"I know not about Israel" cried De Catinat impatiently "I only know that if ~~little~~ my Adèle chose to worship the thunder like an Abenaqui squaw, or turned her innocent prayers to the Mitche Manitou, I should like to set eyes upon the man who would dare to lay a hand upon her. Ha, here comes our Caléche! Whip up, driver, and five louis to you if you pass the gate ~~of the Invalides~~ within the hour."

It was no light matter to drive fast in an age of springless carriages and deeply-rutted roads, but the driver lashed at his two rough unclipped horses, and the caléche jolted and clattered upon it's way. As they sped on, with the roadside trees dancing past the narrow windows, and the white dust streaming behind them, the Guardsman drummed his fingers upon his knees, and fidgetted in his seat with impatience, shooting an occasional question across at his grim companion.

"When was all this then?"

"It was yesterday ~~morning~~ night"

"And where is Adèle now?"

"She is at home ~~now~~"

"And this Dalbert?"

"Oh, he is there also"

"What, you have left ~~them~~ her in his power while you came away to Versailles!"

"She is locked in her room"

"Pah, what is a lock?" The young man raved with his hands in the air at the thought of his own impotence.

"And Pierre is there"

"He is useless"

"And Amos Green"

"Ah, that is better. He is a man, by the look of him"

"~~Where is he~~?"

"~~He lodges with me and is in my care. His father and I have done business this forty years.~~"

"~~A Huguenot~~"

"~~Nay, a very goodly saint~~"

"~~An English man by the name~~"

"~~His mother was one of our own folk from Staten Island near Manhattan. His father was from Nîmes — nay, this a very hard name for a French tongue, but he dwells at Manhattan or New York as they call it now, and he sends me woods and skins in return for my silks and clothes. He but two days since the Golden Rod reached Rouen, and yesterday he came with letters from his father to ask that he may bide with us for some weeks until the Master of the ship comes up for him. He would fain see the ways of the city, though I tell him that this but a dallying with the unclean fleshpots of Egypt~~"

"~~And if he comes from America how do you hold converse with him~~?"

"~~I have told you that~~ His mother was one of our own folk from Staten Island near Manhattan. She was one of those scattered lambs who fled early before the wolves, when first it was seen that the king's hand waxed heavy upon Israel. He speaks French, and yet he is neither French to the eye, nor ~~does~~ are his ways like our ways."

"He has chosen an evil time for his visit"

"Some wise purpose may lie hid in it"

"And you have left him in the house!"

"Yes, he was sat with this Dalbert, smoking with him, and telling him strange tales"

"What guard could he be, he a stranger in a strange land. You did ill to leave Adèle thus, Uncle!"

"She is in God's hand, Amory"

"I trust so! Oh, I am on fire to be there!" He thrust his head through the cloud of dust which rose from the

wheels, and craned his neck to look upon the long curving river and broadspread City which was already visible before them, half hid by a thin blue haze through which shot the double tower of Notre Dame, with the high spire of St Jacque and a forest of other steeples and minarets, the monuments of eight hundred years of devotion. Soon, as the road curved down to the river bank, the City wall grew nearer and nearer until they had passed the southern gate, and were rattling over the stony causeway, leaving the broad Luxembourg upon their right, and Colbert's last work, the Invalides, upon their left. A sharp turn brought them on to the river quays, and crossing over the Pont Neuf, they skirted the stately Louvre, and plunged into the labyrinth of narrow but important streets which extended to the northward. The young officer had his head still thrust out of the window but his view was obscured by a broad gilded carriage which lumbered heavily along in front of them. As the road broadened however it swerved to one side and he was able to catch a glimpse of the house to which they were making.

It was surrounded on every side by an immense crowd.

Chap VI.

A House of Strife

The house of the Huguenot merchant was a ~~high~~ tall narrow building standing at the corner of the Rue St Martin and the Rue de Biron. It was four stories in height, grim and grave like its owner, with high peaked roof, long diamond paned windows, a framework of black wood with gray plaster filling the interstices, and five stone steps which led up to the narrow and sombre door. The upper story was but a warehouse in which the trader kept his stock, but the second and third were furnished with balconies edged with stout wooden balustrades. As the Uncle and the nephew sprang out of the caléche they found themselves upon the outskirts of a dense crowd of people who were swaying and tossing with excitement, their chins all thrown forward and their gaze directed upwards. Following their eyes the young officer saw a sight which left him standing bereft of every sensation save amazement.

From the upper balcony there was hanging head downwards a man clad in the bright blue coat and white breeches of one of the king's dragoons. His hat and wig had dropped off, and his closecropped head swung slowly backwards and forwards a good fifty feet above the pavement. His face was turned towards the street, and was of a deadly whiteness, while his eyes were screwed up as though he dare not open them upon the horror which faced them. His voice however resounded over the whole place until the air was filled with his screams for mercy.

Above him at the corner of the balcony there stood a young man ~~with~~ who leaned with a bent back over the balustrades, and who held the dangling dragoon by either ancle. His face however was not directed towards his victim but was half turned over his shoulder to confront a group of soldiers who were clustering at the long open window which opened out onto the balcony.

His head as he glanced at them was poised with an ~~proud~~ air of defiance, while they surged and oscillated in the opening uncertain whether to rush on or to retire.

Suddenly the crowd gave a groan of excitement. The young man had released his grip upon one of the ancles, and the dragoon hung now by one only, his other leg flapping helplessly in the air. He grabbed aimlessly with his hands at the wall and the woodwork behind him, still yelling at the pitch of his lungs

"Pull me up, son of the devil, pull me up!" he screamed "Would you murder me then! Help, good people, help!"

"Do you want to come up, Captain" said the strong clear voice of the young man above him, speaking excellent French, but in an accent which fell strangely upon the ears of the crowd beneath

"Yes, Sacred name of God, yes!"

"Order off your men then"

"Away, you dolts, you imbeciles! Do you wish to see me dashed to pieces. Away, I say! Off with you!"

"That is better!" said the youth, when the soldiers had vanished from the window. He gave a tug at the dragoon's leg as he spoke which jerked him up so far that he could twist round and catch hold of the lower edge of the balcony "How do you find yourself now?" he asked

"Hold me! For heaven's sake hold me!"

"I have you quite secure"

"Then pull me up"

"Not so fast, Captain. You can talk very well where you are"

"Let me up, sir, let me up!"

"All in good time. I fear that it is inconvenient to you to talk with your heels in the air."

"Ah, you would murder me!"

"On the contrary I am going to pull you up"

"Heaven bless you!"

"But only on conditions"

"Oh, they are granted. I am slipping"

"You will leave this house, you and your men. You will not trouble this old man or this young girl any further. Do you promise?"

"Oh yes, we shall go"

"Word of honour?"

"Certainly. Only pull me up!"

"Not so fast. It may be easier to talk to you like this. I do not know how the laws are over here. Maybe this sort of thing is not permitted. You will promise me that I shall have no trouble over the matter"

"None. None. Only pull me up"

"Very good. Come along!" He dragged at the dragoon's leg while the other gripped his way up the balustrades until, amid a buzz of congratulation from the crowd, he tumbled all in a heap over the rail onto the balcony, where he lay for a few moments ~~[illegible]~~ as he had fallen. Then staggering to his feet, without a glance at his opponent he ~~[illegible]~~ rushed with a bellow of rage through the open window.

Whilst this little drama had been enacted overhead the young guardsman had shaken off his first stupor of amazement, and had pushed his way through the crowd with such vigour that he and his companion had ~~already~~ nearly reached the bottom of the steps. The uniform of the King's Guard was in itself a passport anywhere, and the face of old Catinat was so well known in the district that everyone drew back to clear a path for him towards his house. The door was flung open for them and an old servant stood wringing his hands in the dark passage.

"Oh, master! Oh, master!" he cried "Such doings! Such infamy! They will murder him"

"Whom then?"

"This brave Monsieur from America. Oh, my God, back to them now!" As he spoke a clatter and shouting which had burst out again ~~[illegible]~~ upstairs ended suddenly in a tremendous crash with volleys of oaths and a prolonged bumping and smashing which shook the old house to its foundations. The soldier and the old Huguenot rushed swiftly up the first flight of stairs, and were about to ascend the second one, from the head of which the uproar seemed to proceed, when a great eight day clock came hurtling down, springing four steps at a time and ending with a leap across the landing and a crash against the wall which left it a shattered heap of metal wheels and wooden splinters. An instant afterwards four men, so locked together that they formed but one rolling bundle, came thudding down, amid a debris of splintered stair rails, and writhed and struggled upon the landing, staggering up, falling down, and all breathing together like the wind in a chimney. So twisted and turned were they that it was hard to pick one from the other save that the innermost was clad in black Flemish cloth, while the three who clung to him were soldiers of the king. Yet so strong and vigorous was the man whom they tried to hold that as often as he could find his feet he dragged them after him from end to end of the passage as a boar might pull the curs which had fastened on to his haunches. An officer who had rushed down at the heels of the brawlers thrust his hands in to catch the civilian by the throat, but he whipped them back again with an oath as the man's strong white teeth met in his left thumb. Clapping the wound to his mouth he flashed out his sword and was about to drive it through the body of his unarmed opponent when De Catinat sprang forward and caught him by the wrist.

"You villain, Dalbert!" he cried.

The sudden appearance of ~~the~~ one of the king's

own body guard had a magic effect upon the brawlers. Dalbert sprang back with his thumb still in his mouth, and his sword drooping, scowling darkly at the newcomer. His long sallow face was distorted with anger and his small black eyes blazed with passion and with the hell-fire light of unsatisfied vengeance. His troopers had released their victim, and stood panting in a line, while the young man leaned against the wall, brushing the dust from his black coat, and looking from his rescuer to his antagonists.

"I had a little account to settle with you before, Dalbert" said De Catinat, unsheathing his rapier.

"I am on the king's errand" snarled the other.

"No doubt. On Guard, sir!"

"I am here on duty, I tell you"

"Very good, your sword, sir!"

"I have no quarrel with you"

"No?" De Catinat stept forward and struck him across the face with his open hand

"It seems to me that you have one now" said he.

"Hell and furies!" screamed the Captain "To your arms, men! Hola, there, from above! Cut down this fellow and seize your prisoner. Hola! In the king's name!"

At his call a dozen more troopers came hurrying down the stairs while the three upon the landing advanced upon their former antagonist. He slipped by them however and caught out of the old merchant's hand the thick oak stick which he carried.

"I am with you, sir" said he, taking his place beside the guardsman.

"Call off your canaille and fight me like a gentleman" cried De Catinat

"A gentleman! Hark to the bourgeois huguenot whose family peddles cloth!"

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"You coward! I will write liar on you with my sword point" He sprang forward and sent in a thrust which might have found its way to Dalbert's heart had the heavy sabre of a dragoon not descended from the side and shorn his more delicate weapon short off close to the hilt. With a shout of triumph his enemy sprang furiously upon him with his rapier shortened, but was met by a sharp blow from the cudgel of the young stranger which sent his weapon tinkling on to the ground. A trooper however on the stair had pulled out a pistol and clapping it within a foot of the guardsman's head was about to settle the combat once and for ever, when a little old gentleman who had quietly ascended ~~the stairs~~ from the street, and who had been looking on with an amused and interested smile at this fiery sequence of events, took a sudden quick step forward and ordered all parties to drop their weapons with a voice so decided, so stern, and so full of authority, that the sabre points all clinked down together upon the parquette flooring, as though it were a part of their daily drill.

"Upon my word, gentlemen, upon my word!" said he, looking sternly from one to the other. He was a very small dapper man, as thin as a herring, with projecting teeth and ~~with~~ a huge drooping manycurled wig which cut off the line of his skinny neck and the slope of his narrow shoulders. His dress was a long overcoat of mouse coloured velvet slashed with gold, beneath which were high leather boots which, with his little gold laced three cornered hat gave ~~l~~ a military tinge to his appearance. In his gait and bearing he had a dainty strut and backward cock of the head, which taken with his sharp black eyes, his high thin features, and his assured manner, would impress a stranger with the feeling that ~~this~~ he was a man of power. And indeed ~~yet~~ in France or out of it there were few to whom this

man's name was not familiar, for in all France the only figure which loomed up as large as that of the king was this very little gentleman who stood now, with gold snuff box in one hand, and deep laced handkerchief in the other upon the landing of the Huguenot's house. For who was there who did not know the last of the great French nobles, the bravest of French Captains, the beloved Condé, victor of Rocroy and hero of the Fronde? At the sight of his pinched sallow face the dragoons ~~bend~~ and their leader had stood staring while De Catinat raised the stump of his sword in a salute.

"Heh! Heh!" cried the old soldier peering at him "You were with me on the Rhine, heh? I know your face, Captain. But the household was with Turenne"

"I was in the Regiment of Picardy, your highness. De Catinat is my name."

"Yes, Yes. But you sir, who the devil are you?"

"Captain Dalbert, your highness, of the Languedoc Blue Dragoons"

"Heh! I was passing in my carriage and I saw you standing on your head in the air. The young man let you up on conditions, as I understood."

"He swore he would go from the house" cried the young stranger "Yet when I had let him up he set his men upon me, and we all came down stairs together"

"My faith, you seem to have left little behind you" said Condé, smiling as he glanced at the litter which was strewed all over the floor. "And so you broke your parole, Captain Dalbert"

"I could not hold treaty with a Huguenot and an enemy of the king" said the Dragoon sullenly.

"You could hold treaty, it appears, but not

keep it. And why did you let him go, sir, when you had him at such a vantage."

"I believed his promise"

"You must be of a trusting nature"

"I have been used to deal with Indians"

"Heh! And you think an Indian's word is better than that of an Officer in the King's dragoons"

"I did not think so an hour ago"

"Hem!" Condé took a large pinch of snuff, and brushed the wandering grains from his velvet coat with his handkerchief of point.

"You are very strong, Monsieur" said he, glancing keenly at the broad shoulders and arching chest of the young stranger "You are from Canada, I presume"

"I have been there, sir. But I am from New York"

Condé shook his head. "An Island?"

"No, sir, a town"

"In what province?"

"The province of New York"

"The chief town then?"

"Nay, Albany is the chief town"

"And how come you to speak French?"

"My mother was of French blood"

"And how long have you been in Paris"

"A day"

"Heh! And you already begin to throw your mothers country folk out of windows!"

"He was annoying a young maid, sir, and I asked him to stop whereon he whipped out his sword and would have slain me had I not closed with him, on which he called upon his fellows to aid him. To keep them off I swore that I would drop him over if they moved a step. Yet

when I let him go they set upon me again, and I know not what the end might have been had this gentleman not stood my friend"

"Hem! You did very well. You are young but you have resource"

"I was reared in the woods, sir"

"If there are many of your kidney you may give my friend de Frontenac some work ere he found this Empire of which he talks. But how is this, Captain Dalbert? What have you to say?"

"The king's orders, your highness"

"Heh? Did he order you to molest the girl. I have never yet heard that his Majesty erred by being too harsh with a woman" He gave a little dry chuckle in his throat and took another pinch of snuff.

"The orders are, your highness, to use every means which may drive these people into the true church"

"On my word you look a very fine apostle, and a pretty champion for a holy cause" said Condé, glancing sardonically out of his twinkling black eyes at the brutal face of the dragoon "Take your men out of this, sir, and never venture to set your foot again across this threshold."

"But the king's command, your highness"

"I will tell the king when I see him that I left soldiers and that I find brigands. Not a word, sir! Away! You take your shame with you, and you leave your honour behind!" He had turned in an instant from the sneering strutting old beau, to the fierce soldier with set face, and eye of fire. Dalbert shrank back from his ~~fierce~~ baleful gaze, and muttering an order to his men, they filed off down the stair with clattering feet and clank of sabres.

So "Your highness" said the old Huguenot

coming forward and throwing open one of the doors which led from the landing "You have indeed been a saviour of Israel and a stumbling block to the froward this day. Will you not deign to rest under my roof, and even to take a cup of wine ere you go onwards."

Condé raised his thick eyebrows at the scriptural fashion of the Merchants speech, but he bowed courteously to the invitation and entered the chamber, looking around him in surprise and admiration at it's ~~stately~~ magnificence. With it's pannelling of dark shining oak, it's polished floor, its stately marble chimney piece and it's beautifully moulded ceiling, it was indeed a room which might have graced a palace.

"My carriage waits below" said he "and I must not delay longer. It's not often that I leave my Castle of Chantilly to come to Paris, and it was a fortunate chance which made me pass in time to be of service to honest men. When a house hangs out such a sign as an Officer of Dragoons with his heels in the air it's hard to drive past without a question. But I fear that as long as you are a Huguenot there will be no peace for you in France, Monsieur"

"The law is indeed a heavy upon us"

"And will be heavier if what I hear from Court is correct. I wonder that you do not fly the country, Hah?"

"My business and my duty lie here"

"Well, every man knows his own affairs best. Would it not be ~~best~~ wise to bend to the storm, hah?"

The Huguenot gave a gesture of horror.

"Well, well, I meant no harm. And where is this fair maid who has been the cause of the broil?"

"Where is Adèle, Pierre?" asked the merchant of the old servant, who had ~~as~~ carried in the silver tray with a squat flask, and tinted Venetian glasses.

"I locked her in my room, master"

"And where is she now?"

"I am here, father" ~~A~~ The young girl sprang into the room and threw her arms round the old merchant's neck "Oh, I trust these wicked men have not hurt you, love"

"No, no, dear child, none of us have been hurt thanks to his highness ~~the~~ Prince of Condé here"

~~The queen regent~~ Adèle raised her eyes and quickly drooped them again before the keen questioning gaze of the old soldier. "May God reward your highness!" she stammered. In her confusion the blood rushed to her face and lent the last grace to a face which was perfect in feature and in expression, ~~and which had been chastened rather than marred by the pallor which the events of the morning had left upon her cheeks.~~ With her sweetly delicate contour, her large gray eyes, and the sweep of ~~the auburn~~ the lustrous hair, setting off with its rich tint the ~~two~~ little shell like ears, and the alabaster whiteness of the neck and throat, even Condé who had seen all the beauties of three courts and of sixty years defile before him, stood staring in amazed admiration at the Huguenot maiden.

"Heh! On my word, mademoiselle, you make me wish that I could wipe forty years from my account" He bowed and sighed in the fashion that was in vogue when Buckingham came to the wooing of Anne of Austria, and the dynasty of cardinals was at its height.

"France could ill spare those forty years, your highness"

"Heh! Heh! So quick of tongue too! Your daughter has a courtly wit, Monsieur"

"God forbid, your highness! She is as pure, and good —"

"Nay, that is but a sorry compliment to the court. Surely, Mademoiselle, you would love to ~~see~~ go out into the

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great world, to hear sweet music, ~~look~~ see all that is lovely, and wear all that is costly, rather than look out ever upon the Rue St Martin, and bide in this great dark house until the roses wither upon your cheeks"

"Where my father is I am happy at his side" said she, putting her two hands upon his sleeve "I ask nothing more than I have got"

"And I think it best that you go up to your room again" said the old merchant shortly, for the Prince in spite of his age bore an evil name among women, ~~and~~ He had come close to her as he spoke, and had even placed one yellow hand upon her shrinking arm, while his little dark eyes twinkled with an ominous light.

"Tut! Tut!" said he, as she hastened to obey "You need not fear for your little dove! This hawk atleast is far past the stoop however tempting the quarry. But indeed I can see that she is as good as she is fair, and one could not say more than that if she were from heaven direct. My carriage waits, gentlemen, and I wish you all a very good day!" He inclined his bewigged head, and strutted off in his dainty dandified fashion. From the window De Catinat could see him step into the same gilded chariot which had stood in his way as he drove from Versailles.

"By my faith" said he, turning to the young ~~stranger~~ American "We all owe thanks to the Prince, but it seems to me, sir, that we are your debtors even more. You have risked your life for my cousin, and, but for your cudgel Dalbert would have had his blade through me when he had me at a vantage. Your hand, sir! These are things which a man cannot forget"

"Aye you may well thank him, Amory" broke in the old Huguenot, who had returned ~~from~~ after

escorting his illustrious guest to the carriage " He has been raised up as a champion for the afflicted and as a helper for those who are in need. An old man's blessing upon you, Amos Green, for my own son could not have done for me more than you, a stranger"

But their young visitor appeared to be more embarassed by their thanks than by any of his preceding adventures. The blood flushed to his weather tanned clear cut face, ~~which was still~~ which was as smooth as that of a boy, and ~~was~~ yet marked by a firmness of lip, and a shrewdness in the keen blue eyes which spoke of a strong and self reliant nature.

" I have a mother and two sisters over the water" said he, diffidently.

" And you honour women for their sake ?"

" We always honour women over there. Perhaps it is that we have so few. Over in these old countries you have not learned what it is to be without them. ~~When~~ I have been away up the lakes for furs, living for months on end the life of a savage among the wigwams of the Sacs and the Foxes, foul livers and foul talkers, ever squatting like toads around their fires. Then when I have come back to ~~Hudson~~ Albany, where my folk then dwelt, and have heard my sisters play upon the spinet and sing, and my mother talk to us of the France of her younger days, and of her child-hood, and of all that they had suffered for what they thought was right, then I have felt what a good woman is, and how, like the sunshine, she draws out of one's soul all that is purest and best "

" Indeed the ladies should be very much obliged to Monsieur, who is as eloquent as he is brave" said Adèle Catinat who, standing in the open door, had listened to the latter part of his remarks.

He had forgotten himself for the instant

and had spoken freely and with energy. At the sight of the girl however he coloured up again, and cast down his eyes.

"Much of my life has been spent in the woods" said he "and one speaks so little there that one comes to forget how to do it. It was for this that my father wished me to stay some time in France, for he would not have me grow up a mere trapper and trader"

"And how long do you stop in Paris?" asked the Guardsman

"Until Ephraim Savage comes for me"

"And who is he?"

"The master of the Golden Rod"

"And that is your ship?"

"My father's ship. She has been to Bristol, is now at Rouen, and then must to Bristol again. When she comes back once more Ephraim comes to Paris for me, and it will be time for me to go"

"And how like you Paris?"

The young man smiled "They told me ere I came that it was a very lively place, and truly from the little that I have seen this morning I think that it is the liveliest place that I have seen."

"By my faith" said De Catinat "You came down those stairs in a very lively fashion, four of you together with a Dutch clock as an avant-courrier, and a whole train of wood work at your heels. And you have not seen the City yet?"

"Only as I ~~passed~~ journeyed through it yester evening on my way to this house. It is a wondrous place, but I was spent in for lack of air as I passed through it. New York is a great city. There are said to be as many as ~~seven~~ three thousand folks living there, ~~though I can scarce believe myself to believe it~~ and it could send out no less than four hundred fighting men. Yet from all parts of the City

one may see something of God's handiwork, the trees, the green of the grass, and the shine of the sun upon the bay and the rivers. But here it is stone and wood, and wood and stone, look where you will. In truth you must be very hardy people to keep your health in such a place"

"And to us it is you who seem so hardy with your life in the forest and on the river" cried the young girl "And then the wonder that you can find your path through those great wildernesses, where there is nought to guide you."

"Well there again! I marvel how you can find your way among these thousands of houses. For myself I trust that it will be a clear night tonight"

"And why?"

"That I may see the stars"

"But you will find no change in them"

"That is it. If I can but see the stars it will be easy for me to know how to walk when I would find this house again. In the daytime I can carry a knife and knotch the door posts as I pass, for it might be hard to pick up one's trail again, with so many folk ever passing over it"

De Catinat burst out laughing again. "By my faith you will find Paris livelier than ever" said he "if you blaze your way through on the doorposts as you would on the trees of a forest. But perchance it would be as well that you should have a guide at first so if you have two horses ready in your stables, Uncle, our friend and I might shortly ride back to Versailles together for I have a spell of guard again before many hours are over. Then for some days he might bide with me there, if he will share a soldier's quarters and so see more than the Rue St Martin can offer. How would that suit you, Monsieur Green?"

"I should be right glad to come out with you if we may leave all here in safety"

"Oh fear not for that" said the Huguenot

"The order of the Prince of Condé will be as a shield and a buckler to us for many a day. I will order Pierre to saddle the horses"; ~~and we for our part will be guided by the state of the days~~ "And I must use the little time I have" said the guardsman, as he turned away to where Adèle sat in the window.

Chap VII

The New world and the old.

The young American was soon ready ~~and impatient~~ for the expedition, but De Catinat lingered until the last possible ~~adjusted his own~~ minute. When at last he was able to tear himself away he adjusted ~~cravat, dashing rose water over his hair, and brushing~~ his cravat, brushed his brilliant coat and ~~his bright blue coat with its golden embroidery~~ looked very critically over the sombre suit of his companion.

"Where got you these?" he asked

"In New York ere I left"

"Hem! There is nought amiss with the cloth, and indeed the sombre colour is the mode, but the cut is strange to our eyes"

"I only know that I wish that I had my fringed hunting tunic and leggings on once more"

"This hat now! We do not wear our brims flat like that. See if I cannot mend it!" He took the beaver, and looping up one side of the brim he fastened it with a little golden brooch taken from his own shirt front. "There is a martial cock" said he, laughing "and would do credit to the King's ~~own~~ Musketeers. The black broadcloth and silk hose will pass, but why have you not a sword at your side?"

"I carry a gun when I ride out"

"Mon Dieu, you will be laid by the heels as a bandit"

"I have a knife too"

"Worse and worse! Well, we must dispense with the sword. And with the gun too, I pray. Let me tie your cravat! So!" Now, if you are in the mood for a ten mile gallop I am at your service."

They were indeed a singular contrast, as they walked their horses ~~&~~ together through the narrow and crowded causeways of the Parisian streets. De Catinat, who was the older by five years, with his

delicate small featured face, his sharply trimmed moustache, his small but well set and dainty figure, and his brilliant dress looked the very type of the great nation to which he belonged. His companion however, large limbed and strong, ~~[illegible]~~, turning his bold and yet thoughtful face from side to side, and eagerly taking in all the strange new life amidst which he found himself, was also a type, unfinished it is true, but bidding fair to be the higher of the two. His close yellow hair, ~~and~~ blue eyes, and heavy build showed that it was the blood of his father rather than that of his mother which ran in his veins and even the sombre coat and swordless belt if less pleasing to the eye were true badges of ~~the~~ a race which found it's fiercest battles and it's most glorious victories in bending nature to it's will upon ~~on~~ the seas, and ~~in~~ in the waste places ~~of~~ the earth.

"What is yonder great building?" he asked, as they emerged into a broader square.

"It is the Louvre, one of the palaces of the king"

"And is he there?"

"Nay, he lives at Versailles"

"What! Fancy that a man should have two such houses"

"Two! He has many more, St Germain, Marly, Fontainebleau, Clagny"

"But to what end? A man can but live at one at a time"

"Nay, he can now come or go as the fancy takes him"

"It is a wondrous building. I have seen the Seminary of St Sulpice at Montreal, and thought that it was the greatest of all houses, and yet what is it beside this?"

"You have been to Montreal then? You remember the Fort"

"Yes, and the Hotel Dieu, and the wooden houses in a row, and eastward the great mill with the wall

But what do you know of Montreal?"

"I have soldiered there, and at Quebec too. Why, my friend, you are not the only man of the woods in Paris for I give you my word that I have worn the Caribou Moccassins, the leather jacket and the fur cap with the eagle feather for six months at a stretch and I care not how soon I do it again"

Amos Green's eyes shone with delight at finding that his companion and he had so much in common, and he plunged into a series of questions which lasted until they had crossed the river and reached the South Westerly gate of the City. By the moat and walls long lines of men were busy at their drill.

"Who are these then?" he asked, gazing at them with curiosity

"They are some of the kings soldiers"

"But why so many of them. Do they await some enemy"

"Nay, we are at peace with all the world. Worse luck!"

"At peace. Then why all these men?"

"That they may be ready"

The young man shook his head in bewilderment. "They might be as ready in their own homes surely. In our country every man has his musket in his chimney corner, and is ready enough, yet he does not waste his time when all is at peace"

"Our king is very great, and he has many enemies"

"But who made the enemies?"

"Why, the king to be sure"

"Then would it not be better to be without him?"

The Guardsman shrugged his epaulettes in despair "We shall both wind up in the Bastille or Vincennes at this rate" said he "You must know that he is in

serving the country that he has made these enemies. It is but five years since he made a peace at Nimeguen, by which he tore away sixteen fortresses from the Spanish Lowlands. Then also he has laid his hands upon Strasburg and upon Luxemburg, and has chastised the Genoans, so that there are many who would fall upon him if they thought that he were weak."

"And why has he done all this?"

"Because he is a great king, and for the glory of France"

The stranger pondered over this answer for some time as they rode on between the high thin poplars which threw bars across the sunlit road.

"There was a great man in Schenectady once" said he at last. "They are simple honest folk up yonder and they all had great trust in each other. But after this man came among them they began to miss one a beaver skin, and one a bag of ginseng, and one a belt of wampum, until at last old Pete Hendricks lost his chestnut three-year-old. Then there was a search and a fuss until they found all that had been lost in the stable of the newcomer, so we took him, I and some others, and we hung him up on a tree without ever thinking what a great man he had been"

De Catinat shot an angry glance ~~to~~ at his companion.

"Your parable, my friend, is scarce polite" said he "If you and I are to travel in peace you must keep a closer guard upon your tongue"

"I would not give you offence, and it may be that I am wrong" answered the American "but I speak as the matter seems to me, and it is the right of a free man to do that"

De Catinat's frown relaxed as the other turned his ~~keen~~ earnest ~~grey~~ blue eyes upon him.

"By my soul where would the Court be if every man did that" said he "But what in the name of heaven is amiss now?" His companion had hurled himself off his horse and was bending low over the ground with his eyes bent upon the dust. Then with quick noiseless steps he zigzagged ~~across~~ along the road, ran swiftly across a grassy bank and stood peering at the gap of a fence, with his nostrils dilated, his eyes shining, and his whole face aglow with eagerness.

"The fellow's brain is gone" muttered De Catinat, as he caught at the ~~rein~~ bridle of the riderless horse "The sight of Paris has shaken his wits. What in the name of the devil ails you, that you should stand glaring there?"

"A deer has passed" whispered the other, pointing down at the grass. "It's trail lies along there and through into the wood. It could not have been long ago, and there is no slur to the track so that it was not going fast. Had we but brought my gun we might have followed it, and brought the old man back a side of venison"

"For God's sake get on to your horse again" cried De Catinat distractedly "I fear that some evil will come upon you ere I get you safe to the Rue St Martin again"

"And what is wrong now?" asked Amos Green, swinging himself into the saddle.

"Why, man, these woods are the king's preserves and you speak as coolly of slaying his deer as though you were on the shores of Michigan."

"Preserves! They are tame deer!" An expression of deep disgust passed over his face, and, spurring his horse, he galloped onwards at such a pace that De Catinat after vainly endeavouring to keep up had to shriek to him to stop.

"It is not usual in this country to ride so madly along the roads" he panted.

"It is a very strange country" cried the stranger in perplexity "Maybe it would be easier for me to remember what is allowed. ~~than what is not~~. It was but this morning that I took my gun out to shoot a pigeon that was flying over the roofs in yonder street, and ~~that~~ old Pierre he caught my arm with a face as though it were the minister that I was aiming at. And then there is ~~that~~ the old man — why they will not even let him say his prayers!"

De Catinat laughed. "You will come to know our ways soon" said he "This is a crowded land, and if all men rode and shot as they listed much harm would come from it. But let us talk rather of your own country. You have lived much in the woods from what you tell me"

"I was but ten when first I journeyed with my uncle to Sault Sa Marie where the three great lakes meet to trade ~~across~~ with the Chippewas and the tribes of the West"

"I know not what Sa Salle or De Frontenac would have said to that. The trade in those parts belongs to France"

"We were taken prisoners, and so it was that I came to see Montreal and afterwards Quebec. ~~Afterwards~~ In the end we were sent back because they did not know what they could do with us"

"It was a good journey for a first"

"And ever since I have been trading. First on the Kennebec with the Abenaquis, in the great forests of Maine, and with the Mic-mac fisheaters over the Penobscot. Then later with the Iroquois as far west as the country of the Senecas. At Albany and Schenectady we stored our pelts and so on to New York where my father shipped them over the sea."

"But he could ill spare you surely"

"Very ill. But as he was rich he thought it best that I should learn some things that are not to be found in the woods. And so he sent me in the Golden Rod under the

care of Ephraim Savage."

"Who is also of New York"

"Nay, he is the first man that ever was born at Boston"

"I cannot remember the names of all these villages"

"And yet there may come a day when these names shall be as well known as that of Paris."

De Catinat laughed heartily. "The woods may have given you much, but not the gift of prophecy, my friend. Well my heart is often over the water even as yours is, and I would ask nothing better than to see the palisades of Point Levi again, even if all the five nations were raving upon the other side of them. But now if you will look there in the gap of the trees you will see the king's new palace."

The two young men pulled up their horses and ~~were~~ looked down at the wide spread building in all the beauty of it's dazzling whiteness, and at the lovely grounds, dotted with fountain and with statue, and barred with hedge and with walk, stretching away to the dense woods which clustered round them. It amused De Catinat to watch the swift play of wonder and admiration which flashed over his companion's features.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked at last.

"I think that God's best work is in America, and man's in Europe."

"Aye, and in all Europe there is no such palace as that, even as there is no such king as he who dwells within it."

"Can I see him, think you?"

"Who? The king? No, no, I fear you are scarce made for a court"

"Nay, I would show him all ~~respect~~ honour"

"How then? What greeting would you give him?"

"I would shake him respectfully by the hand, and

ask as to his health and that of his family"

"On my word I think that such a greeting might please him more than the bent knee and the rounded back, and yet, I think, my son of the woods that it were best not to lead you into paths where you would be as lost as would any of these Courtiers if you dropped them in the gorge of the Saguenay. But hola! What comes here? It looks like one of the carriages of the court."

A ~~rolling~~ white cloud of dust which had rolled towards them down the road was now so near that the glint of gilding and the red coat of the coachman could be seen breaking out through it. As the two cavaliers reined their horses aside to ~~give~~ leave the roadway clear, the coach rumbled heavily past them, drawn by two dapple grays, and the horsemen caught a glimpse as it passed of a beautiful but haughty face which looked out at them. An instant afterwards a sharp cry had caused the driver to pull up his horses, and a white hand beckoned to them through the carriage window.

"It is Madame de Montespan, the proudest woman in France" whispered De Catinat "She would speak with us so do as I do" He touched his horse with the spur, gave a gambade which took him across to the carriage, and then sweeping off his hat he bowed to his horse's neck, a salute in which he was imitated, though in a somewhat ungainly fashion by his companion.

"Ha, Captain" said the lady, with no very pleasant face "We meet again"

"Fortune has ever been good to me, Madame"

"It was not so this morning"

"You say truly. It gave me a hateful duty to perform"

"And you performed it in a hateful fashion"

"Nay, Madam, what could I do more?"

The Lady sneered, and her beautiful face turned as bitter as it could upon occasion.

"You thought that I had no more power with the king. You thought that my day was past. No doubt it seemed to you that you might reap favour with the new by being the first to cast a slight upon the old."

"But Madame —"

"You may spare your protestations. I am one who judges by deeds and not by words. Did you then think that my ~~beauty~~ charm had so faded, that any beauty which I may ever have had is so withered."

"Nay, Madam, I were blind to think that"

"Blind as a noontide owl" said Amos Green with emphasis

Madame de Montespan arched her eyebrows, and glanced at her singular admirer.

"Your friend atleast speaks that which he really feels" said she "At four o'clock today we shall see whether others are of the same mind, and if they are then it may be ill for those who mistook what was but a passing shadow for a lasting cloud" She cast another vindictive glance at the young guardsman, and rattled on once more upon her way.

"Come on!" cried De Catinat curtly, for his companion was staring open mouthed after the carriage "Have you never seen a woman before?"

"Never such a one as that"

"Never one with so railing a tongue, I dare swear" said De Catinat

"Never one with so lovely a face." And yet there is a lovely face at the Rue St Martin also"

"You seem to have a nice taste for beauty, for all

your woodland training."

"Yes, for I have been cut away from ~~them~~ women so much that when I stand before one I feel that she is something tender and sweet and holy"

"You may find dames at the court who are both tender and sweet, but you will look long, my friend, before you find the holy one. This one would ruin me, if she can, and only because I have done what it was my duty to do. To keep oneself in this court is like coming down the La Chine rapids where there is a rock to right, and a rock to left, and another perchance in front, and if you so much as graze one where are you and your birch canoe? But our rocks are women, and in our canoe we bear all our worldly fortunes. Now here is another who would sway me over to her side, and indeed I think that it may prove to be the better side too"

They had passed through the gate way of the palace, and the broad sweeping drive lay in front of them, dotted with carriages and horsemen. On the gravel walks were many gaily dressed ladies, who strolled among the flower beds, or watched the fountains with the sunlight glinting upon their high water sprays. One of these, who had kept her eyes turned upon the gate came hastening forwards the instant that De Catinat appeared. It was Mademoiselle Nanon, the confidante of Madame de Maintenon"

"I am so pleased to see you, Captain" she cried "and I have waited so patiently. Madame would speak with you. The king comes to her at three, and we have but twenty minutes. I heard that you had gone to Paris, and so I stationed myself here. Madame has something which she would ask you."

"Then I will come at once. Ah, De Bussac, this well met"

A tall and burly ~~An~~ officer was passing in the same uniform which De Catinat wore. He turned at once and came smiling towards his comrade.

"Ah, Amory, you have covered a league or two from the dust on your ~~boots~~ coat."

"We are fresh from Paris. But I am called on business. This is my friend, ~~Mr.~~ Monsieur Amos Green. I leave him in your hands, for he is a stranger from America and would fain see all that you can show. He stays with me at my quarters. And my horse too, De Brissac. You can give it to the groom" Throwing his bridle to his brother officer, and pressing the hand of Amos Green, De Catinat sprang from his horse and followed at the top of his speed in the direction which the young lady had already taken.

"

Chap XIII
The rising Sun

The rooms which were inhabited by the lady who had already taken so marked a position at the Court of France were as humble as were her fortunes at the time when they were allotted to her, but with that rare tact and self restraint which were the leading features in her remarkable character she had made no change in her living with the increase of her prosperity and forebore from provoking envy and Jealousy by any display of wealth or of power. In a side wing of the palace, far from the central salons, and only to be reached by long corridors and stairs, were the two or three small chambers upon which the eyes first of the Court, then of France, and finally of the world were destined to be turned. In such rooms had the destitute widow of the poet Scarron been housed when she had first been brought to court by Madame de Montespan as the governess of the royal chamber, and in such rooms she still dwelt now that she had added to her maiden Françoise d'Aubigny the title of Marquise de Maintenon with the pension and estate which the king's favour had awarded her. Here it was that every day the king would lounge, finding in the conversation of a clever and virtuous woman a charm and a pleasure which none of the professed wits of his sparkling court had ever been able to give to him, and here too the more sagacious of the courtiers were beginning to understand was the point, formerly to be found in the magnificent salons of the De Montespan, whence flowed all those impulses and tendencies which were so eagerly studied and so keenly followed up by all

who wished to keep the favour of the king. It was a simple creed that of the court. Were the king pious then let them all turn to their missals and their rosaries. Were he rakish then who so rakish as his devoted followers! But woe to the man who was rakish when he should be praying, or who pulled a long face when the king wore a laughing one. And thus it was that keen eyes were ever fixed upon him, and upon every influence that came near him, so that the wary courtier watching the first subtle signs of a coming change might so order his conduct as to seem to lead rather than to follow.

The young guardsman had scarcely ever exchanged a word with this powerful lady, for it was her taste to isolate herself and to appear with the Court only at the hours of devotion. It was therefore with some feelings both of nervousness and of curiosity that he followed his guide down the gorgeous corridors, where art and wealth had been strewn with so lavish a hand. ~~that~~ The lady paused in front of the chamber door, and turned to her companion.

"Madame wishes to speak to you of what occurred ~~today~~ this morning" said she "I should advise you to say nothing to Madame about your creed, for it is the only thing upon which her heart can be hard." She raised her finger to emphasize the warning, and, tapping at the door, she pushed it open.

"I have brought Captain de Catinat, Madame" said she.

"Then let the Captain step in". The voice was firm and yet sweetly musical. Obeying the command De Catinat found himself in a room which

was no larger and but little better furnished than that which was allotted to his own use. Yet though simple everything in the chamber was scrupulously neat and clean, betraying the dainty taste of a refined woman. The stamped leather furniture, the de Saonnière carpet, the pictures ~~small~~ of sacred subjects, ~~but~~ exquisite from an artist's point of view, the plain but tasteful curtains, all left an impression half religious and half feminine but wholly soothing. Indeed the soft light, the high white statue of the virgin in a canopied nich, with a perfumed red lamp burning before it, and the wooden prie-dieu, with the red edged prayerbook upon the top of it, made the apartment look more like a private chapel than a fair lady's boudoir.

On each side of the empty fireplace were two little green covered armchairs, the one for Madame, and the other reserved for the use of the king. A small three legged stool between them was heaped with her work basket and her tapestry. On the chair which was furthest from the door, with her back turned to the light, Madame was sitting as the young officer entered. It was her favourite position and yet there were few women of her years who had so little reason to fear the sun, for a healthy life and active habits had left her with a clear skin and delicate bloom which any young beauty of the Court might have envied. Her figure was graceful and queenly, her gestures and pose full of a natural dignity, and her voice, as he had already remarked, most sweet and melodious. Her face was handsome rather than beautiful, set in a statuesque classical mould, with broad white forehead, firm delicately sensitive mouth, and a pair of large serene gray eyes, earnest and placid

in repose but capable of reflecting the whole play of her soul from the merry gleam of humour to the quick flash of righteous anger. An elevated serenity was however the leading expression of her features, and in that she presented the strongest contrast to her rival whose beautiful ~~features~~ face ~~was~~ was ever swept by the emotion of the moment, and who gleamed one hour and shadowed over the next like a cornfield in the ~~sward~~ wind. In wit and quickness of tongue it is true that De Montespan had the advantage, but the strong common sense and the deeper nature of the elder woman might prove in the end to be the ~~stronger~~ better weapon. De Catinat at the moment, without having time to notice details, was simply conscious that he was in the presence of a very handsome ~~and~~ woman, and that her large pensive eyes were fixed critically upon him, and seemed to be reading his thoughts as they had never been read before.

"I think that I have already seen you, sir, have I not?" she asked

"Yes, Madame, I have once or twice had the honour of attending upon ~~madame~~ you, though it may not have been my good fortune to address you."

"My life is so quiet and retired that I fear that much of what is best and worthiest at the court is unknown to me. It is the curse of such places that evil flaunts itself before the eye and can not ~~scarce~~ be overlooked while the good retires in it's modesty, so that at times we scarce dare hope that it is there. You have served, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Madam. In the Lowlands, on the Rhine, and in Canada"

"In Canada! Ah! What nobler ambition could woman have than to be a member of

that sweet sisterhood which was founded by the holy Marie de l'incarnation and the sainted Jeanne le Ber at Montreal. It was but the other day that I had an account of them from Father Godet des Marais. What Joy to be one of such a body, and to turn from the blessed work of converting the heathen to the even more precious task of nursing back health and strength into those of God's warriors who have been struck down in the fight with Satan"

It was strange to De Catinat, who knew well the sordid and dreadful existence led by these same sisters, threatened even with misery, hunger, and the scalping knife to hear this lady at whose feet lay all the good things of this earth speaking enviously of their lot.

"They are very good women" said he shortly remembering Mademoiselle Nanon's warning, and fearing to trench upon the dangerous subject.

"And doubtless you have had the privilege also of seeing the holy Bishop Laval"

"Yes, Madame, I have seen Bishop Laval"

"And I trust that the Sulpitians still hold their own against the Jesuits?"

"I have heard, madame, that the Jesuits are the stronger at Montreal and the others at Quebec"

"And who is your own director, Monsieur?"

De Catinat felt that the worst had come upon him "I have none, Madame"

"Ah, it is too common to dispense with a director, and yet I know not how I could guide my steps in the difficult path which I tread if it were not for mine. Who is your confessor then?"

"I have none. I am of the reformed church, Madame"

The lady gave a gesture of horror; and a sudden hardening showed itself in mouth and eye.

"What in the court itself" she cried "and in the neighbourhood of the king's own person!"

De Catenat was lax enough in matters of faith, and held his creed rather as a family tradition than from any strong conviction, but it hurt his self esteem to see himself regarded as though he had confessed to something that was loathsome and unclean.

"You will find, madame" said he sternly "that members of my faith have not only stood around the throne of France, but have even seated themselves upon it"

"God has for his own all-wise purposes permitted it, and none should know it better than I, whose grandsire François d'Aubigny did so much to place a crown upon the head of the great Henry. But Henry's eyes were opened ere his end came, and I pray, Oh from my heart I pray, that yours may be also" She rose and throwing herself down upon the prie-dieu sunk her face in her hands for some few minutes during which the object of her devotions stood in some perplexity in the middle of the room hardly knowing whether such an attention should be regarded as an insult or as a favour. A tap at the door brought the lady back to this world again, and her devoted attendant answered her summons to enter.

"The king is in the Hall of Victories, Madame" said she "He will be here in five minutes."

"Very well. Stand outside and let me know when he comes. Now, sir" she continued when they were alone once more "You gave a

note of mine to the king this morning?"

"I did, Madame"

"And, as I understand, Madame de Montespan was refused admittance to the grand lever?"

"She was, Madame"

"But she waited for the king in the passage"

"She did"

"And wrung from him a promise that he would see her today"

"Yes, Madame"

"I would not have you tell me that which it may seem to you a breach of your duty to tell. But I am fighting now against a terrible foe, and for a great stake. Do you understand me?

De Catinat bowed.

"Then what do I mean?"

"I presume that what Madame means is that she is fighting for the king's favour with the lady you mentioned."

"As Heaven is my Judge I have no thought of myself. I am fighting with the devil for the king's soul."

"Tis the same thing, Madame"

The lady smiled.

"If the king's body were in peril I could call on the aid of his faithful Guards, and not less so now, surely, when so much more is at stake. Tell me then at what hour was the king to meet the Marquise in her room"

"At four, Madame."

"I thank you. You have done me a service, and I shall not forget it."

"The King comes, Madame" said Mademoiselle Nanon, again protruding her head.

"Then you must go, Captain. Pass through the other room and so into the outer passage. And take this! It is Bossuet's Statement of the Catholic Faith. It has softened the hearts of others, and may yours. Now, Adieu!"

De Catinat passed out through another door, and as he did so he glanced back. The lady had her back to him and her hand was raised to the mantel-piece. At the instant that he looked she moved her neck and he could see what she was doing. She was pushing back the long hand of the clock.

Chapter IX
Le Roi S'amuse.

The Captain de Latinat had hardly vanished through the one door before the other was thrown open by Mademoiselle Nanon, and the king entered the room. Madame de Maintenon rose with a pleasant smile, and curtsyed deeply, but there was no answering light upon her visitor's face, and he threw himself down upon the vacant armchair with a pouting lip and a frown upon his forehead.

"Nay, now this is a very bad compliment" she cried with the gaiety which she could assume whenever it was necessary to draw the king from his blacker humours "My poor little dark room has already cast a shadow over you"

"Nay it is Father La Chaise and the Bishop of Meaux who have been after me all day like two hounds on a stag, with talk of my duty and my position, and my sins, with Judgment and Hell fire ever at the end of their exhortations."

"And what would they have your Majesty do?"

"Break the promise which I made when I came upon the throne, and which my grandfather made before me. They wish me to recall the Edict of Nantes, and drive the Huguenots from the kingdom"

"Oh, but your Majesty must not trouble your mind about such matters"

"You would not have me do it, Madame?"

"Not if it is to be a grief to your Majesty"

"You have perchance some soft feeling for the religion of your youth"

"Nay, sire, I have nothing but hatred for heresy."

"And yet you would not have them thrust out?"

"Bethink you, sire, that the Almighty can himself incline their hearts to better things if He is so minded, even as mine was inclined. May you not leave it in His hands."

"On my word" said Louis brightening "it is well put. I shall see if ~~St~~ Father La Chaise can find an answer to that. It is hard to be threatened with eternal flames because one will not ruin one's kingdom. Eternal torment! I have seen the face of a man who had been in the Bastille for fifteen years. It was like a dreadful book with a scar or a wrinkle to mark every hour of that ~~[illegible]~~ death in life. But eternity!" He shuddered and his eyes were filled with the horror of his thought. The higher motives had little power over ~~of~~ his soul, as those about him had long discovered, but he was ever ready to wince at the ~~thought~~ image of the terrors to come.

"Why should you think of such things, sire" said the lady in her rich soothing voice "What have you to fear, you who have been the first son of the church!"

"You think that I am safe then?"

"Surely, sire"

"But I have erred and erred deeply. You have yourself said as much"

"But that is all over, sire. Who is there who is without stain! You have turned away from temptation. Surely then you have earned your forgiveness."

"I would that the Queen were living once more. She would find me a better man"

"I would that she were, sire!"

"And she should know that it was to you that she owed the change. Oh, Françoise, you are surely my guardian angel who have taken bodily form! How can I thank you for what you have done for me!" He leaned forward and took her hand, but at the touch a sudden fire sprang into his eyes, and he would have

passed his other arm round her had she not risen hurriedly to avoid the embrace.

"Sire!" said she, with a rigid face, and one finger upraised.

"You are right, you are right, Françoise. Sit down and I will control myself. Still at the same tapestry then! My workers at the Gobelins must look to their laurels" He raised one border of the glossy roll, while she, having resetted herself, though not without a quick questioning glance at her companion, took the other end into her lap and continued her work.

"Yes, sire, it is a hunting scene in your forests at Fontainebleau. A stag of ten tines, you see, and the hounds in full cry, and a gallant band of cavaliers and ladies. Has your Majesty ridden today?"

"No. How is it, Françoise, that you have such a heart of ice?"

"I would it were so, sire. Perhaps you have hawked then?"

"No. But surely no man's love has ever stirred you! And yet you have been a wife"

"A nurse, sire, but never a wife. See the lady in the Park! It is surely Mademoiselle. I did not know that she had come up from Choisy."

But the King was not to be distracted from his subject.

"You did not love this Scarron then?" he persisted "He was old, I have heard, and as lame as some of his verses"

"Do not speak lightly of him, sire. I was grateful to him, I honoured him, I liked him"

"But you did not love him"

"Why would you seek to read the secrets of a woman's heart?"

"You did not love him, Françoise!"

"At least I did my duty towards him"

"Has that nun's heart never yet been touched by love then?"

"Sire, do not question me!"

"Has it never —

"Spare me, sire, I beg of you!"

"But I must ask for my own peace hangs upon your answer."

"Your words pain me to the soul"

"Have you never, Françoise, felt in your heart some little flicker of the love which glows in mine?" He rose with his hands outstretched, a pleading monarch, but she with half turned head still shrank away from him.

"Be assured of one thing, sire" said she "that even if I loved you as no woman ever loved a man yet I should rather spring from that window on to the stone terraces beneath than ever by word or sign confess as much to you"

"And why, Françoise?"

"Because, sire, it is my highest hope upon earth that I have been chosen to lift up your mind towards loftier things, that mind the greatness and the nobility of which none know more than I."

"And is my love so base then?"

"You have wasted too much of your life and of your thoughts upon woman's love. And now, sire, the years steal on and the day is coming when ~~soon~~ you will be called upon to give an account of your actions and even of the innermost thoughts of your heart. I would see you spend the time that is left to you, sire, in building up the church, in showing a noble example to your subjects, and in repairing any evil which that example may have done in the past"

The king sunk back into his chair with a

groan "For ever the same" said he. "Why, you are worse than Father La Chaise and Bossuet

"Nay, nay" said she gaily, with the quick tact for which she never failed "I have wearied you, when you have stooped to honour my little room with your presence. That is indeed ingratitude, and it were a just punishment if you were to leave me in solitude tomorrow, and so cut off all the light of my day. But tell me, sire, how go the works at Marly? I am all on fire to know whether the great fountain will work"

"Yes, the fountain plays well, but Mansard has thrown the right wing too far back. I have made him a good architect, but I have still much to teach him. I showed him his faults on the plan this morning, and he promised to amend it"

"And what will the change cost, sire?"

"Some millions of livres, but then the view will be much improved from the South side. I have taken in another mile of ground in that direction, for there were a number of poor folk living there, and their hovels were far from pretty."

"And why have you not ridden today, sire?"

"Pah, it brings me no pleasure. There was a time when my blood was stirred by the blare of the horn and the rush of the hoofs, but now it is all wearisome to me"

"And hawking too?"

"Yes, I shall hawk no more."

"But, sire, you must have amusement"

"What is so dull as an amusement which has ceased to amuse! I know not how it is. When I was but a lad and my mother and I

were driven from place to place with the Fronde at war with us, and Paris in revolt, ~~with~~ our throne and even our lives in danger, all life seemed to be so bright, so new, and so full of interest. Now that there is no shadow, and that my voice is the first in France, ~~and~~ as France's is in Europe, all is dull and lacking in flavour. What use is it to have all pleasure before one, when it turns to wormwood when it is tasted?"

"True pleasure, sire, lies rather in the inward life, the serene mind, the easy conscience. And then as we grow older is it not natural that our minds should take a graver bent? We might well reproach ourselves if it were not so, for it would show that we had not learned the lesson of life"

"It may be so, and yet it is sad and weary when nothing amuses. But who is there?"

"It is my companion knocking. What is it, Mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur Corneille to read to the king" said the young lady opening the door.

"Ah yes, sire. I know how foolish is a woman's tongue, and so I have brought a wiser one than mine here to charm you. Monsieur Racine was to have come, but I hear that he has had a fall from his horse, and he sends his friend in his place. Shall I admit him?"

"Oh, as you like, Madame, As you like" said the king listlessly. At a sign from Mademoiselle Nanon a little peaky man with a shrewd petulant face and long gray hair falling back over his shoulders entered the room. He bowed profoundly three times, and then seated

himself nervously on the very edge of the stool from which the lady had removed her work basket. She smiled and nodded to encourage the poet, while the monarch leaned back in his chair with an air of resignation.

"Shall it be a comedy, or a tragedy, or a burlesque pastoral?" Corneille asked timidly.

"Not the burlesque pastoral" said the king with decision "Such things may be played but cannot be read, since they are for the ~~ear~~ eye rather than the ear"

The poet bowed his acquiescence.

"And not the tragedy, Monsieur" said Madame de Maintenon, glancing up from her tapestry "The king has enough that is serious in his graver hours, and so I trust that you will use your talent to amuse him"

"Aye, let it be a comedy" said Louis "I have not had a good laugh since poor Molière passed away."

"Ah, your Majesty has indeed a fine taste" cried the courtier poet. "Had you condescended to turn your own attention to poetry where should we all have been then?"

Louis smiled, for no flattery was too gross to please him.

"Even as you have taught our generals war, and our builders art so you would have set your poor singers a loftier strain. But Mars would hardly deign to share the humbler laurels of Apollo"

"I have sometimes thought that I had some such powers" answered the king complacently "though amid my toils and the burdens of State I have had, as you say, little

time for the softer arts."

"But you have encouraged others to do what you could so well have done yourself, sire. You have brought out poets as the sun brings out flowers. How many have we not seen, Moliere, Boileau, Racine, one greater than the other. And the others too, the smaller ones, Scarron, so scurrilous and yet so witty — Oh, holy virgin what have I said?"

Madame had laid down her tapestry, and was staring in intense indignation at the poet, who writhed on his stool under the stern rebuke of those cold gray eyes.

"I think, Monsieur Corneille, that you had better go on with your reading" said the king drily.

"Assuredly, sire. Shall I read ~~ab~~ my play about Darius?"

"And who was Darius?" asked the king, whose education had been so neglected by the crafty policy of Cardinal Mazarin, that he was ignorant of everything save what had come under his own personal observation.

"Darius was king of Persia, sire"

"And where was Persia?"

"It is a kingdom of Asia"

"Is Darius still king there?"

"Nay, sire, he fought against Alexander the Great"

"Oh, I have heard of Alexander. He was a famous king and general, was he not?"

"Like your Majesty, he both ruled wisely and led his armies victoriously."

"And was king of Persia, you say?"

"No, sire, of Macedonia. It was Darius who was king of Persia"

The king frowned, for the slightest correction

was offensive to him.

"You do not seem very clear about the matter, and I confess that it does not interest me deeply" said he "Pray turn to something else"

"Then is my 'Pretended Astrologer'"

"Yes, that will do"

Corneille commenced to read his comedy, while Madame de Maintenon's white and delicate fingers picked among the many coloured silks which she was weaving into her tapestry. From time to time she glanced across first at the clock and then at the king who was leaning back with his ~~sick~~ lace handkerchief thrown over his face. It was twenty minutes to four now, but she knew that she had put it back on half an hour, and that the true time was ten minutes past.

"Tut! tut!" cried the king suddenly, "there is something amiss there. The second last line has a limp in it surely". It was one of his foibles to pose as a critic, and the wise poet would fall in with his corrections, however unreasonable they might be.

"Which line, sire? It is indeed an advantage to have one's faults made clear"

"Read the passage again"

"Et si, quand je lui dis le secret de mon ame,
Avec moins de rigueur elle eût traité ma flamme,
Dans ma façon de vivre, et suivant mon humeur,
Une autre eût eu bientôt le présent de mon coeur"

"Yes, the third line has a foot too many. Do you not remark it, Madame?"

"No, but I fear that I should make a poor critic"

"Your Majesty is perfectly right" said Corneille unblushingly "I shall mark the passage, and

see that it is corrected"

"I thought that it was wrong. If I do not write myself you can see that I have at least got the correct ear. A false quantity jars upon me. It is the same in music. Although I know little of the matter I can tell a discord where Lully himself would miss it. I have often shown him errors of the sort in his operas, and I have always convinced him that I was right."

"I can readily believe it, your Majesty."

Corneille had picked up his book again, and was about to resume his reading, when there came a sharp tap at the door.

"It is his highness, the minister, Monsieur de Louvois" said Mademoiselle de Nanon

"Admit him!" answered Louis "Monsieur Corneille, I am obliged to you for what you have read, and I regret that an affair of state will now interrupt your comedy. Some other day perhaps I may have the pleasure of hearing the rest of it" He smiled in the gracious fashion which made all who came within his personal influence forget his faults and remember him only as the impersonation of dignity and of courtesy. The poet with his book under his arm slipped out, while the famous minister, tall, heavily wigged, eagle-nosed and commanding, came bowing into the little room. His manner was that of exaggerated politeness, but his haughty face marked only too plainly his contempt for such a chamber and for the lady who dwelt there. She was well aware of the feeling with which he regarded her, but her perfect self command prevented her from ever by word or look returning his dislike.

"My apartments are indeed honoured today" said she, rising with outstretched hand "Can Monsieur condescend to a stool since I have no fitter seat

to offer you in this little doll's house. But perhaps I am in the way, if you wish to talk of State affairs to the King. I can easily withdraw into my boudoir"

"No, no, nothing of the kind, Madame" cried Louis "It is my wish that you should remain here. What is it, Louvois?"

"A messenger arrived from England with dispatches, your Majesty" answered the minister, his ponderous figure balanced upon the three legged stool "There is very ill feeling there, ~~for the Protestants do not relish a Catholic king~~, and there is some talk of a rising ~~against him~~. The letter from Lord Sunderland wished to know whether in case the Dutch took ~~up~~ the side of the malcontents, ~~the~~ the king ~~France~~ might look to France for help. Of course, knowing your Majesty's mind, I answered unhesitatingly that he might"

"You did what!"

"I answered, sire, that he might"

King Louis flushed with anger and he caught up the tongs from the grate with a motion as though he would have struck his minister with it. Madame sprang from her chair, and laid her hand upon his arm with a soothing gesture. He threw down the tongs again, but his eyes still flashed with passion as he turned them upon Louvois"

"How dared you!" he cried

"But, sire —"

"How dared you, I say! What! You venture to answer such a message without consulting me. How often am I to tell you that I am the state, I alone, that all is to come from me, and that I am answerable to God ~~alone~~ only. What are you? My instrument, my tool! And you venture

to act without my authority."

"I thought that I knew your wishes, sire" stammered Louvois, whose haughty manner had quite deserted him, and whose face was as white as the ruffles of his shirt.

"You are not there to think about my wishes, sir. You are there to consult them and to obey them. Why is it that I have turned away from my old nobility, and have committed the affairs of my kingdom to men whose names have never been heard of in the history of France, such men as Colbert & yourself. I have been blamed for it. There was the Duc de St Simon who said the last time that he was at the Court that it was a bourgeois government. So it is. But I wished it to be so because I knew that the nobles have a way of thinking for themselves, and I ~~wished~~ asked for no thought but mine in the governing of France. But if my bourgeois are to receive messages, and give answers to embassies, then indeed I am to be pitied. I have marked you of late, Louvois. You have grown beyond your station. You take too much upon yourself, sir. See to it that I have not again to complain to you upon this matter!"

The humiliated minister sat, as one crushed, with his chin sunk upon his breast. The king ~~[illegible]~~ muttered and frowned for a few minutes, but the cloud cleared gradually from his face, for his fits of anger were usually as short as they were fierce and sudden.

"You will detain that messenger, Louvois" he said at last in a calm voice.

"Yes, sire"

"And we shall see at the Council meeting tomorrow that a fitting reply be sent to Lord

Sunderland. It would be best perhaps not to be too free with our promises in the matter. ~~If James could make head against his enemies, and yet were not strong enough to crush them, it is likely that there would be a long civil war in England, and that our hands would be more free in the Palatinate. What does your solidity think of that?" turning to the Lady.~~

~~"Your Majesty is always wise"~~

"These English have ever been a thorn in our sides. If we could leave them among their own fogs with such a quarrel as would keep them busy for a few years, then indeed we might crush this Dutch prince at our leisure. Their last civil war lasted ten years, and their next may do as much. We could carry our frontier to the Rhine long ere that. Eh, Louvois?"

"Your armies are ready, sire, on the day that you give the word"

"But war is a costly business. I do not wish to have to sell the court plate as we did the other day. How are the public funds?"

"We are not very rich, sire, but there is one way in which money may very readily be gained. There was some talk this morning about the Huguenots and whether they should dwell any longer in this Catholic kingdom. Now if they were driven out, and if their property were taken by the state, then indeed your Majesty would at once become the richest monarch in Christendom."

"But you were against it this morning, Louvois?"

"I had not had time to think of it, sire"

"You mean that Father La Chaise, and the Bishop had not had time to get at you" said

Louis shrewdly "Ah, Louvois, I have not lived with a court round me all these years without learning how things are done. It is a word to him, and so on to another, and so to a third, and so to the king. When my good fathers of the Church have set themselves to bring anything to pass, I see traces of them at every turn, as one traces a mole by the dirt which it has thrown up. But I will not be moved against my own reason to do a wrong to those who, however mistaken they may be, are still the subjects whom God has given me."

"I would not have you do so, sire" cried Louvois in confusion. The King's accusation had been so true that he had been ~~a~~ unable at the moment even to protest.

"I know but one person" continued Louis, glancing across at Madame de Maintenon, "who has no ambitions, who desires neither wealth nor preferment, and who can therefore never be bribed to sacrifice my interests. That is why I value that person's opinions so highly." He smiled at the lady as he spoke, while his minister cast a glance at her which showed the jealousy which ate into his soul.

"It was my duty to point this out to you, sire, not as a suggestion, but as a possibility" said he, rising "I fear that I have already taken up too much of your Majesty's time, and I shall now withdraw." He ~~bowed~~ Bowing slightly to the lady, and profoundly to the monarch, he walked from the room.

"Louvois grows intolerable" said the king "I know not where his insolence will end. Were it not that he is an excellent servant I

should have sent him from the Court before this. He has his own opinion upon everything. It was but the other day that he would have it that I was wrong when I said that one of the windows in the Trianon was smaller than any of the others. It was the same size, said he. I brought Le Nôtre with his measures, and of course the window was, as I had said, too small. But I see, by your clock that it is four o'clock. I must go"

"My clock, sire, is half an hour slow"

"Half an hour" The king looked dismayed for an instant, and then began to laugh. "Nay, in that case" said he "I had best remain where I am, for it is too late to go, and I can say with a clear conscience that it was the clock's fault rather than mine."

"I trust that it was nothing of very great importance, sire" said the lady, with a look of demure triumph in her eyes.

"By no means."

"No state affair?"

"No, no, it was only that it was the hour at which I had intended to rebuke the conduct of a presumptuous person. But perhaps it is better as it is. My absence will in itself convey my message, and in such a sort that I trust I may never see that person's face more at my court. But ah, what is this?"

The door had been flung open, and Madame de Montespan, beautiful and furious, was standing before them.

Chap. X.

~~A dangerous mission~~
An Eclipse at Versailles

Madame de Maintenon was a woman who was always full of self restraint and of cool resource. She had risen in an instant with ~~the~~ an air as of ~~one~~ she had who at least seen ~~seen~~ the welcome guest for whom ~~one~~ she had pined in vain. With a frank smile of greeting she advanced with outstretched hand.

"This is indeed a pleasure!" said she

But Madame de Montespan was very angry, so angry that she was evidently making strong efforts to keep herself within control, and to avoid breaking into a furious outburst. Her face was very pale, her lips compressed, and her blue eyes had the set stare and ~~the~~ cold glitter of a furious woman's. So for an instant they faced each other, the one frowning, the other smiling, two of the most beautiful and queenly women in France. Then De Montespan, disregarding her rival's outstretched hand, turned towards the king, who had been looking at her with a darkening face.

"I fear that I intrude, sire"

"Your entrance, Madame, is certainly somewhat abrupt"

"I must crave ~~crave~~ pardon if it is so. Since this lady has been the governess of my children I have been in the habit of coming into her room unannounced."

"As far as I am concerned you are most welcome to do so" said her rival with perfect composure.

"I confess that I had not even thought it necessary to ask your permission, Madame." the other answered coldly.

"Then you shall certainly do so in the

future, madame" said the king sternly "It is my express order to you that every possible respect is to be shown in every way to this lady"

"Oh, to this lady" with a wave of her hand in her direction. "Your Majesty's commands are of course our laws. But I must remember that it is this lady for sometimes one may get confused as to which name it is that your Majesty has picked out for honour. To day it is de Maintenon, yesterday it was Fontanges, tomorrow — Ah, well, who can say who it may be tomorrow?" She was superb in her pride and her fearlessness as she stood with her sparkling blue eyes and her heaving bosom, looking down upon her royal lover. Angry as he was his gaze lost something of its sterness as it rested upon her round full throat and the delicate lines of her shapely shoulders. There was something very becoming in her passion, in the defiant poise of her dainty head, and the magnificent scorn with which she glanced at her rival.

"There is nothing to be gained, Madame, by being insolent" said he.

"Nor is it my custom, sire"

"And yet I find your words so"

"Truth is always mistaken for insolence, sire, at the Court of France"

"We have had enough of this"

"A very little truth is enough"

"You forget yourself, Madame. I beg that you will leave the room"

"I must first remind your Majesty that I was so far honoured as to have an appointment this afternoon. At four o'clock I had your royal promise that you would

come to me. I cannot doubt that your Majesty will keep that promise in spite of the fascinations which you may find here."

"I should have come, Madame, but the clock as you may observe is half an hour slow, and the time had passed before I was aware of it."

"I beg, sire, that you will not let that distress you. I am returning to my chamber, and five o'clock will suit me as well as four."

"I thank you, Madame, but I have not found this interview so pleasant that I should seek another."

"Then your Majesty will not come"

"I should prefer not"

"In spite of your promise!"

"Madame!"

"You will break your word!"

"Silence, Madame! This is intolerable"

"It is indeed intolerable!" cried the angry lady, throwing all discretion to the winds "Oh, I am not afraid of you, sire. I have loved you, but I have never feared you. I leave you here. I leave you with your conscience and your — your lady confessor. But one word of truth you shall hear before I go. You have been false to your wife, and you have been false to your mistress, but it is only now that I find that you can be false also to your word." She swept him an indignant curtsey and glided with head erect out of the room.

The king sprang from his chair as if he had been stung. Accustomed as he was to his gentle little wife, and the even gentler La Vallière, such language as this had never before intruded itself upon the royal ears. It was like a

physical blow to him. He felt stunned, humiliated, bewildered by so unwonted a sensation. What odour was this which mingled for the first time with the incense amid which he lived. And then his whole soul rose up in anger ~~against~~ at her, ~~against~~ at the woman who had dared to raise her voice against him. That she should be jealous of and insult another woman, that was excusable. It was in fact an indirect compliment to himself. But that she should turn upon <u>him</u> as if they were merely man and woman, instead of ~~lover~~ monarch and subject, that was too much! He gave an inarticulate cry of rage and rushed to the door.

"Sire!" Madame de Maintenon, who had watched keenly the swift play of his emotions over his expressive face, took two quick steps forward, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"I will go after her"

"And why, sire?"

"To forbid her the Court"

"But, sire, —"

"You heard her! It is infamous! I shall go"

"But, sire, could you not write"

"No, no, I shall see her" He pulled open the door.

"Oh, sire, be firm then!" It was with an anxious face that she watched him start off, walking rapidly with angry gestures down the Corridor. Then she turned back and dropping upon her knees on the prie-dieu, bowed her head in prayer for the king, for herself, and for France.

De Catinat the Guardsman had employed himself in showing his young friend

from over the water all the wonders of the great palace, which the other had examined keenly, and had criticised or admired with an independence of Judgment and a native correctness of taste, natural to a man whose life had been spent in freedom amid the noblest works of nature. Grand as were the mighty fountains and the artificial cascades they had no overwhelming effect upon one who had travelled up from Erie to Ontario, and had seen the Niagara river hurl itself over it's precipice, nor were the long level swards so very large to eyes which had ~~seen~~ looked upon the great plains of the Dacotah. The building itself however, it's extent, it's height, and the beauty of its stone filled him with aston--ishment.

"I must bring Ephraim Savage here" he kept repeating "He would never believe else that there was one house in the world which would weigh more than all Boston and New York put together"

De Catinat had arranged that the American should ~~ride back to Paris~~ remain with his friend Major de Brissac, as the time had come round for his own second turn of guard. ~~Having seen them start he had hardly returned to the Palace, and~~ He had hardly stationed himself in the Corridor, when he was astonished to see the king, without escort or attendants, walking swiftly down the passage. His delicate face was disfigured with anger and his mouth was set grimly like a man who had taken a momentous resolution.

"Officer of the Guard!" said he shortly

"Yes, sire!"

"What! You again, Captain de Catinat? You have not been on duty since morning?

"No, sire. It is my second guard"

"Very good. I wish your assistance"

"I am at your command, sire"

"Is there a suballern here?"

"Lieutenant de la Tremouille is at the side guard"

"Very well. You will place him in command"

"Yes, sire"

"You will yourself go to Monsieur de Vivonne. You know his apartments?"

"Yes, sire"

"If he is not there you must go and seek him. Wherever he is you must find him within the hour"

"Yes, sire"

"You will give him an order from me. At six o'clock he is to be in his carriage at the East gate of the Palace. His sister, Madame de Montespan will await him there, and he is charged by me to drive her to the ~~palace~~ chateau of Petit Bourg. You will tell him that he is answerable to me for her arrival there.

"Yes, sire". De Catinat raised his sword in salute, and started upon his mission.

The king passed on down the Corridor, and opened a door which led him into a magnificent anti-room, all one blaze of mirrors and gold, furnished to a marvel with the most delicate ebony and silver suite, on a deep red carpet of Aleppo, as soft and yielding as the moss of a forest. In keeping with the furniture was the sole occupant of this stately chamber, a little

negro boy in a livery of velvet picked out with silver tinsel, who stood as motionless as a small swart statuette against the door which faced that through which the king entered.

"Is your mistress there?"

"She has just returned, sire"

"I wish to see her"

"Pardon, sire, but she —"

"Is everyone to thwart me today?" snarled the king, and taking the little page by his velvet collar he hurled him to the other side of the room. Then, without knocking, he opened the door and passed on into the lady's boudoir.

It was a large and ~~very~~ lofty room, very different to that from which he had just come. Three long windows, from ceiling to floor, took up one side, and through the delicate pink tinted blinds the evening sun cast a subdued and dainty light. Great gold candalebra glittered between the mirrors upon the wall, and Le Brun had expended all his wealth of colouring upon the ceiling where Louis himself in the character of Jove, hurled down his thunderbolts upon a writhing heap of Dutch and Palatine Titans. Pink was the prevailing tone in tapestry, carpet, and furniture, so that the whole room seemed to shine with the sweet tints of the inner side of a shell, and when lit up, as it was then, formed ~~was~~ such a chamber as some fairy hero might have built up for his princess. At the further side, ~~face~~ prone ~~[illegible]~~ upon an Ottoman, her face buried in the cushion, her beautiful white arms thrown over it, the rich coils of her brown hair hanging in ~~beautiful~~ disorder across the long curve of her

ivory neck, lay, like a drooping flower, the woman whom he had come to discard.

At the sound of the closing door she had glanced up, and then, at the sight of the king, she sprang to her feet and ran towards him, her hands out, her ~~blue~~ blue eyes bedimmed with tears, her whole beautiful figure softening into womanliness and humility.

"Ah, sire!" she cried, with a pretty little sun-burst of Joy through her tears "Then I have wronged you! I have wronged you cruelly! You have kept your promise. You were but trying my faith! Oh, how could I have said such words to you – how could I pain that noble heart! But you have come after me to tell me that you have forgiven me" She put her arms forward with the trusting air of a pretty child who claims an embrace as her due, but the king stept swiftly back from her, and warned her away from him with an angry gesture.

"All is over for ever between us" he cried harshly "Your brother will await you at the East Gate at six o'clock, and it is my command that you wait there until you receive my further orders"

She ~~stept~~ staggered back as if he had struck her.

"Leave you!" she cried.

"You must leave the Court"

"The Court! Aye, willingly, this instant! But you! Ah, sire, you ask what is impossible"

"I do not ask, Madame. I order. Since you have learned to abuse your position your

presence has become intolerable. The United kings of Europe have never dared to speak to me as you have spoken today. You have insulted me in my own palace, me, Louis, the king. Such things are not done twice, Madame. Your insolence has carried you too far this time. You thought that because I was forbearing that I was therefore weak. It seemed to you that if you only humoured me one moment, you might treat me as if I were your equal the next, for that this poor puppet of a king could always be bent this way or that. You see your mistake now! At six o'clock you leave Versailles for ever". His eyes flashed, and his small upright figure seemed to swell in the violence of his indignation, while she leaned away from him one hand across her eyes, and one thrown forward as if to screen her from that ~~baleful~~ angry gaze.

"Oh, I have been wicked!" she cried "I know it. I know it."

"I am glad, Madame, that you have the grace to acknowledge it"

"How could I speak to you so! How could I! Oh that some blight may come upon this unhappy tongue. I, who have had nothing but good from you! I to insult you, who are the author of all my happiness! Oh, sire, forgive me, forgive me, for pity's sake forgive me!"

Louis was by nature a kind hearted man. His feelings were touched, and his pride also was flattered by the abasement of this beautiful and haughty woman. His other favourites had been amiable to all, but this one was so proud so unyielding until she felt his master hand.

His face softened somewhat in its expression as he glanced at her, but he shook his head and his voice was as firm as ever as he answered.

"It is useless, Madame" said he "I have thought this matter over for a long time, and your madness today has only hurried what must in any case have taken place. You must leave the palace"

"I will leave the palace. Say only that you forgive me. Oh, sire, I cannot bear your anger. It crushes me down. I am not strong enough. It is not banishment, it is death to which you sentence me. Think of our long years of love, sire, and say that you forgive me. I have given up all for your sake, husband, honour, everything. Oh, will you not give your anger up for mine! My God, he weeps, Oh, I am saved, I am saved!"

"No, no, Madame" cried the king, dashing his hand across his eyes "You see the weakness of the man, but you shall also see the firmness of the king. As to your insults today, I forgive them freely, if that will make you more happy in your retirement. But I owe a duty to my subjects also, and that duty is to set them an example. We have thought too little of such things. But a time has come when it is necessary to review our past life, and to prepare for that which is to come."

"Ah, sire, you pain me. You are not yet in the prime of your years and you speak as though old age were upon you. In a score of years from now it may be time for folk to say that age has ~~not~~ made a change in your life"

The King winced "Who say so?" he cried angrily.

"Oh, sire, it slipped from me unawares. Think no more of it. Nobody says so. Nobody"

"You are hiding something from me. Who said who says this?"

"Oh, do not ask me, sire"

"You said that it was reported that I had changed my life not through religion, but through stress of years. Who said so?"

"Oh, sire, it was but foolish court gossip, all unworthy of your attention. It was but the empty common talk of cavaliers who had nothing else to say to gain a smile from their ladies"

"The common talk!" Louis flushed crimson "Have I then grown so aged. You have known me for nearly twenty years. Do you see such changes in me?"

"To me, sire, you are as pleasing and as gracious as when you first won the heart of Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente."

The king smiled as he looked at the beautiful woman before him.

"In very truth" said he "I can say that there has been no such great change in Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente either. But still it is best that we should part, Françoise"

"If it add to your happiness, sire, I shall go, though it be to my death."

"Now that is the proper spirit"

"You have but to name the place, sire, Petit Bourg, Chargny, or my own Convent of St Joseph in the Faubourg St Germain. What matter where the flower withers, when once the sun

has forever turned from it. At least the past is ~~my~~ mine ~~mine~~ and I shall live in the remembrance of ~~that~~ the days when none had come between us, and when your sweet love was all my own. Be happy, sire, be happy, and think no more of what I said about the foolish gossip of the Court. Your life lies in the future. Mine is in the past. Adieu, dear sire, adieu!" She threw forward her arms, her eyes dimmed over, and she would have fallen had Louis not sprung forward and caught her in his arms. Her beautiful head drooped upon his shoulder, his breath was warm upon his cheek, and the subtle scent of her hair was in his nostrils. His arm as he held her rose and fell with her bosom, and he felt her heart, beneath his hand, fluttering like a caged bird. Her broad white throat was thrown back, her eyes ~~slightly~~ almost closed, her lips just parted enough to show the line of pearly teeth, her beautiful face not three inches from his own. And then suddenly the eyelids quivered, and the great blue eyes looked up at him, lovingly, appealingly, half deprecating, half challenging, her whole soul in a glance. Did he move? Or was it she? Who could tell! But their lips had met in a long kiss, and then in another, and plans and resolutions were streaming away from Louis like autumn leaves in the west wind.

"Then I am not to go! You would not have the heart to send me away, would you?"

"No, no, but you must not annoy me, Françoise"

"I had rather die than cause you an instant of grief. Oh, sire, I have seen so little of you lately! And I love you so! It has maddened me. And then that dreadful woman—"

"Who then?"

"Oh I must not speak against her. I will be civil for your sake even to her, the widow of old Scarron"

"Yes, yes, you must be civil. I cannot have any unpleasantness"

"But you will stay with me, sire" her supple arms coiled themselves round his neck. Then she held him for an instant at armslength, to feast her eyes upon his face, and then drew him once more towards her "You will not leave me, dear sire. It is so long since you have been here"

The sweet face, the pink glow in the room, the hush of the evening, all seemed to join in their sensuous influence. Louis sank down upon the settee

"I will stay" said he

"And that carriage, dear sire, at the East door"

"I have been very harsh with you, Françoise. You will forgive me! Have you paper and pencil that I may countermand the order"

"They are here, sire, upon the side table. I have also a note which, if I may leave you for an instant, I will write in the Anteroom." She swept out with triumph in her eyes. It had been a terrible fight, but all the greater the credit of her victory. She took a little pink slip of paper from an inlaid desk, and dashed off a few words upon it. They were 'Should Madame de Maintenon have any message for his Majesty ~~she~~ he will ~~find~~ be ~~been~~ for the next few hours in the room of Madame de Montespan'. This she addressed to her rival, and it was sent on the spot, together with the king's order, by the hands of the little black page.

Chap XI

~~The Bargain of the Church~~

The Sun reappears

For nearly a week the king ~~remained~~ was constant to his new humour. The routine of his life remained unchanged, save that it was the room of the frail beauty, rather than of Madame de Maintenon, which attracted him in the afternoon. And in sympathy with this sudden relapse into his old life his coats lost something of their sombre hue, and fawncolour, buffcolour and lilac began to replace the blacks and the blues. A little gold lace (budded gold) reappeared upon his hats also, and at the trimmings of his pockets, (while) and for three days on end his prie dieu at the Royal chapel had been unoccupied. His walk was brisker and he gave a youthful flourish to his cane as a defiance to those who had seen in his reformation the first symptoms of age. Madame had known her man well, when she threw out that artful insinuation.

And as the king brightened so all the great Court brightened too. The Salons began to resume their former splendour, and gay coats and glittering embroidery which had lain in drawers for years were seen once more in the Halls of the Palace. In the Chapel Bourdaloue preached in vain to empty benches, but a ballet in the Grounds was attended by the whole Court, and received with a frenzy of enthusiasm. The Montespan ante room was crowded every morning with men and women who had some suit to be urged, while her rival's ~~room~~ chambers were ~~was~~ as deserted as they had been before the king first turned a gracious ~~face~~ look upon her. ~~Faces~~ Faces which had been long banished the Court began to reappear in the corridors and Gardens, unchecked and unrebuked, while the black cassock of the Jesuit

and the purple soutan of the Bishop were less frequent colours in the royal circle.

But the church party who if they were the champions of bigotry were also those of virtue, were never seriously alarmed at this relapse. The grave eyes of priest or of prelate watched Louis in his escapade as wary huntsmen might watch a young deer which gambols about in the meadow under the impression that it is masterless, when every gap and path is netted, and it is in truth as much in their hands as though it were lying bound before them. They knew how short a time it would be before some ache, some pain, some chance word, would bring his mortality home to him again, and envelope him once more in those superstitious terrors which took the place of religion in his mind. They waited therefore and they silently planned how the prodigal might best be dealt with on his return.

To this end it was that his confessor, Father La Chaise, and Bossuet, the great Bishop of Meaux, waited one morning upon Madame de Maintenon in her chamber. With a globe beside her she was endeavouring to teach geography to the lame Duc du Maine, and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse, who had enough of their father's disposition to make them averse to learning, and of their mother's to cause them to hate any discipline or restraint. ~~With~~ Her wonderful tact however and her unwearying patience ~~their teacher~~ had won the love and confidence even of these little perverse princes, and it was one of Madame de Montespan's most bitter griefs, that not only her royal lover, but even her own children turned away from the brilliancy and

riches of her ~~own~~ salon, to pass their time in the modest apartment of her rival.

Madame de Maintenon dismissed her two pupils, and received the ecclesiastics with the mixture of affection and respect which was due to those who were not only personal friends, but great lights of the Gallican church. She had suffered the ~~great~~ minister Louvois to sit upon a stool in her presence, but the two chairs were allotted to the priests now, and she insisted upon reserving the humbler seat for herself. The last few days had cast a pallor over her face which spiritualised and refined the features, but she wore unimpaired the expression of sweet serenity which was habitual to her.

"I see, my dear daughter, that you have sorrowed" said Bossuet, glancing at her with a kindly and yet searching eye.

"I have indeed, your grace. All last night I spent in prayer that this trial may pass away from us"

"And yet you ~~need~~ have no need for fear, Madame — none, I assure you. Others may think that your influence has ceased. But we, who know the king's heart, we think otherwise. A few days may pass, a few weeks at the most, and once more it will be upon ~~you~~ your rising fortunes that every eye in France will ~~be~~ turn~~ed~~"

The lady's brow clouded and she glanced at the Prelate as though his speech were not altogether to her taste. "I trust that pride does not lead me astray" she said "but if I can read my own soul aright there is no thought of myself in the grief which now tears my heart. What is power to me? What do I desire? A little room, leisure

for my devotions, a pittance to save me from want, what more can I ask for? Why then should I covet power. If I am sore at heart it is not for any poor loss which I may have sustained. I think no more of it than of the snapping of one of the threads on yonder tapestry frame. It is for the king I grieve, for the noble heart, the kindly soul, which might rise so high and which is dragged so low, like a royal eagle with some foul weight which ever hampers its flight. It is for him and for France that my days are spent in sorrow, and my nights upon my knees."

"For all that, my daughter, you are ambitious"

It was the Jesuit who had spoken. His voice was clear and cold, and his piercing grey eyes seemed to read into the depths of his soul.

"You may be right, father. God guard me from self esteem. And yet I do not think that I am. The king in his goodness has offered me titles. I have refused them; money, I have returned it. He has deigned to ask my advice in matters of State and I have witheld it. Where then is my ambition?"

"In your heart, my daughter. But it is not a sinful ambition. It is not an ambition of this world. Would you not love to turn the king towards good?"

"I would give my life for it"

"And there is your ambition. Ah, can I not read your noble soul. Would you not love to see the Church reign pure and supreme over all this realm, to see the poor housed, the needy helped, the wicked turned from their ways, and the king ever the leader in all that is noble and good. Would you not love that, my daughter?"

Her cheeks had flushed and her eyes shone as she looked at the gray face of the Jesuit and saw the picture which his words had conjured up before her.

"Ah, that would be Joy indeed!" she cried

"And greater Joy still to know, not from the mouths of the people, but from the voice of your own heart in the privacy of your chamber, that you had been the cause of it, that your influence had brought this blessing upon the king and upon the country"

"I would die to do it"

"We wish you to do what may be harder. We wish you to live to do it"

"Ah!" She glanced from one to the other with questioning eyes.

"My daughter" said Bossuet solemnly, leaning forward with his broad white hand outstretched, and his purple pastoral ring sparkling in the sunlight. "It is a time for plain speaking. It is in the interests of the church that we do it. None hear, and none ~~f~~ shall ever hear what passes between us now. Regard us, if you will, as two Confessors with whom your secret is inviolable. I call it a secret, and yet it is none to us, for it is our mission to read the human heart. You love the king"

"Your Grace!" She started, and a warm blush mantling up in her pale cheeks, deepened and spread until it tinted her white forehead and her queenly neck.

"You love the king"

"Your Grace! Father!" She turned in confusion from one to the other.

"There is no shame in loving, my daughter. The shame lies only in yielding to love. I say again that you love the king."

"Atleast I have never told him so" she faltered.

"And will you never?"

"May Heaven wither my tongue first!"

"But consider, my daughter. Such love in a soul like yours is Heaven's gift and sent for some wise purpose. This human love is too often but a noxious weed which blights the soil it grows in, but here it is a gracious flower, all fragrant with humility and virtue"

"Alas, I have tried to tear it from my heart!"

"Nay, rather hold it firmly rooted there. Did the king but meet with some tenderness from you, some sign that his own affection was met with an answer from your heart, it might be that this ambition which you profess would be secured, and that Louis, strengthened by the intimate companionship of your noble nature, might live in the spirit as well as in the forms of the church. All this might spring from the love which you hide away as though it bore the brand of shame"

The lady half rose, glancing from the prelate to the priest with eyes which had a lurking horror in their depths.

"Can I have understood you!" she gasped "What meaning lies behind these words. You cannot counsel me to —"

The Jesuit had risen and his spare figure towered above her.

"My daughter, we give no counsel which is unworthy of our office. We speak for the interests of Holy Church, and those interests demand that you should marry the king"

"Marry the king!" The little room swam round her "Marry the king!"

"There lies the best hope for the future. We

see in you a second Jean D'Arc who will save both France and France's king."

Madame sat silent for a few moments. Her face had regained it's composure, and her eyes were bent vacantly upon her tapestry frame as she turned over in her mind all that was involved in the suggestion.

"But surely, surely, this could never be" she said at last "Why should we plan that which can never come to pass?"

"And why?"

"What king of France has married a subject. See how every princess of Europe stretches out her hand to him. The Queen of France must be of queenly blood, even as the last was"

"All this may be overcome"

"And then there are the reasons of state. If the king marry it should be to form a powerful alliance, to cement a friendship with a neighbour nation, or to gain some province which may be the bride's dowry. What is my dowry? A widow's pension and a work box" She laughed bitterly, and yet glanced eagerly at her companions, as one who would wish to be confuted.

"Your dowry, my daughter, would be those gifts of body and of mind with which Heaven has endowed you. The king has money enough, and the king has provinces enough. As to the State how can the State be better served than by the assurance that the king will be saved in future from such sights as are to be seen in this Palace today"

"Oh, if it could be so! But think, father, think of those about him, the Dauphin, Monsieur his brother, his ministers. You know how little this

would please them, and how easy it is for them to sway his mind. No, no, it is a dream, father, and it can never be."

The faces of the two ecclesiastics, who had dismissed her other objections with a smile and a wave, clouded over at this, as though she had at last touched upon the real obstacle.

"My daughter" said the Jesuit gravely "that is a matter which you may leave to the church. It may be that we too have some power over the king's mind, and that we may lead him in the right path even though those of his own blood would fain have it otherwise. The future only can show with whom the power lies. But you? Love and duty both draw you one way now, and the Church may count upon you"

"To my last breath, father"

"And you upon the Church. It will serve you if you in turn will but serve it"

"What higher wish could I have"

"You will be our daughter, our Queen, our champion, and you will heal the wounds of the suffering church"

"Ah, if I could!"

"But you can. While there is heresy within the land there can be no peace or rest for the ~~Church~~ faithful. It is the speck of mould which will in time, if it be not pared off, corrupt the whole fruit."

"What would you have then, father?"

"The Huguenots must go. They must be driven forth. The goats must be divided from the sheep. The King is already in two minds. Louvois is our friend now. If you are with us then all will be well"

"But, father, think how many there are!"

"The more reason that they should be

dealt with"

"And think too of their sufferings should they be driven forth"

"Their cure lies in their own hands"

"That is true. And yet my heart softens for them"

Father La Chaise and the Bishop shook their heads. Nature had made them both kind and charitable men but the heart turns to flint when the blessing of religion is changed to the curse of sect.

"You would befriend God's enemies then!"

"No, no, not if they are indeed so"

"Can you doubt it. Is it possible that your heart still turns towards the heresy of your youth?"

"No, father, but it is not in nature to forget that my father and my grandfather —"

"Nay, they have answered for their own sins. Is it possible that the church has been mistaken in you? Do you then refuse the first favour which she asks of you? You would accept her aid, and yet you would give none in return"

Madame de Maintenon rose with the air of one who has made her resolution.

"You are wiser than I" said she "And to you have been committed the interests of the church. I will do what you advise"

"You promise it?"

"I do"

Her two visitors threw up their hands together "It is a blessed day" they cried "and generations yet unborn will learn to deem it so"

She sat half stunned by the prospect which was opening out in front of her. Ambitious she had, as the Jesuit had surmised, always been — ambitious for the power which would enable her to leave the world better than she found it. And this ambition she had already

to some extent been able to satisfy, for more than once already she had swayed both king and kingdom. But to marry the king, to marry the man for whom she would gladly lay down her life, whom in the depths of her heart she loved in as pure and as noble a fashion as woman ever yet loved man, that was indeed a thing above her utmost hopes. She knew her own mind and she knew his. Once his wife she could hold him to good, and keep every evil influence away from him. She was sure of it. She should be no weak Maria Theresa, but rather, as the priest had said, a new Joan of Arc, come to lead France and France's king into better ways. And if to gain this aim she had to harden her heart against the Re- Huguenots, at least the fault, if there were one, lay with those who made this condition rather than with herself. The king's wife! The heart of the woman, and the soul of the enthusiast, both leaped at the thought.

But close at the heels of her joy there came a sudden revulsion to doubt and despondency. Was not all this fine prospect a mere day dream, and how could these men be so sure that they held the king in the hollow of their hand! The Jesuit read the fears which dulled the sparkle of her eyes, and answered her thoughts before she had time to put them into words.

"The Church redeems its pledges swiftly" said he "And you, my daughter, you must be as prompt when your own turn comes."

"I have promised, father"

"Then it is for us to perform. You will remain in your room all evening"

"Yes, father"

"The king already hesitates. I spoke with him this morning and his mind was full of blackness and despair. His better self turns in disgust

from his sins, and dis now, when the first hot fit of repentance is just coming upon him, that he may best be moulded to our ends. I have to see and speak with him once more, and I go from your room to his. And when I have spoken he will come from his room to yours or I have studied his heart for twenty years in vain. We leave you now, and you will not see us, but you will see the effects of what we do, and you will remember your pledge to us." They bowed low to her, both together, and left her to her thoughts.

An hour passed, and then a second one, as she sat in her fauteuil, her tapestry before her but her hands listless upon her lap, waiting for her fate. Her life's future was now being settled for her, and she was powerless to turn it one way or the other. Daylight turned to the pearly light of evening, and that again to dusk, but she still sat waiting in the shadow. Sometimes as a ~~quick~~ step passed in the corridor she would glance expectantly towards the door, and the light of welcome would spring up in her ~~beautiful face~~ gray eyes, only to die away again into disappointment. At last however there came a quick sharp tread, crisp and authoritative, which brought her to her feet with flushed cheeks and her heart beating wildly. The door opened, and she saw outlined against the gray light of the outer passage the erect and graceful figure of the king.

"Sire! One instant and Mademoiselle will light the lamp"

"Do not call her" He entered, and closed the door behind him "Francoise, the dusk is welcome to me, because it screens me from the reproaches which must lie in your glance, even if your tongue be too kindly to utter them"

"Reproaches, sire! God forbid that I should

alter them!"

"When I last left you, Françoise, it was with a good resolution in my mind. I tried to carry it out, and I failed – I failed. I remember that you warned me. Fool that I was not to follow your advice"

"We are all weak and mortal, sire. Who has not fallen! Nay, sire, it goes to my heart to see you thus" He was standing by the fireplace, his elbows resting upon the mantelpiece, his face buried in his hands, and she could tell by the catch of his breath that he was ~~sobbing~~ weeping. All the pity of her woman's nature went out to that silent and repenting figure, dimly seen in the falling light. She put out her hand with a gesture of sympathy, and it rested for an instant upon his velvet sleeve. The next he had clasped it between his own, and she made no effort to release it.

"I cannot do without you, Françoise" he cried "I am the loneliest man in all this world, like one who lives on a great mountain peak with none to bear him company. Who have I for a friend? Who can I rely upon? Some are for the church, some are for their families, most are for themselves, but who of them all is single minded. You are my better self, Françoise – you are my guardian angel. What the good father says is true, and the nearer I am to you the further am I from all that is evil. Tell me, Françoise, do you love me?"

"I have loved you for years, sire" Her voice was low but clear, the voice of a woman to ~~whom~~ whom coquetry was ~~so~~ abhorrent ~~as deceit~~.

"I knew that wealth and title have no attraction for you, ~~Françoise~~, and that your heart turns rather towards the convent than the palace. Yet I ask you to remain in the palace, and to reign there. Will you be my wife, Françoise?"

And so the moment had in very truth come. She paused for an instant, only an instant, before taking this last great step, but even that was too long for the patience of the king.

"Will you not, Francoise?" he cried, with the ring of fear in his voice.

"May God make me worthy of such an honour, sire" said she "And here I swear that if Heaven double my life every hour shall be spent in the one endeavour to make you a happier man!"

She had knelt down, and the king still holding her hand knelt down beside her.

"And I swear too" he cried "that if my days also are doubled ~~that~~ you will now and for ever be the one and only woman for me"

And so their ~~double~~ oath was taken, an oath which was to be tested in the future, for each did live to ~~do~~ almost double their years, and yet neither ever broke the promise made hand in hand on that autumn evening in the shadow-girt chamber.

Chap XII.
The King receives

It may have been that Mademoiselle Nanon, the faithful confidante of Madame de Maintenon had learned something of this interview, or it may be that Père La Chaise, with the shrewdness for which his order is famous, had come to the conclusion that publicity was the best means of holding the king to his present intention, but whatever the source it was known all over the Court next day that the old favourite was again in disgrace, and that there was talk of a marriage between the king and the governess of his children. ~~Back into wardrobe~~ It was whispered at the petit lever, confirmed at the Grande entrée, and was common gossip by the time that the king had returned from chapel. Back into wardrobe and drawer went the flaring silks and the feathered hats, and out once more came the sombre coat and the matronly dress. Scudery and Calprenedi gave place ~~once more~~ to the missal and St Thomas a Kempis, while Bourdaloue after preaching for a week to empty benches, found his chapel packed to the last seat with weary gentlemen and taper-bearing ladies. By midday there was none in the Court who had not heard the tidings, save only Madame de Montespan who, alarmed at her lover's absence, had remained in haughty seclusion in her room, and ~~had heard~~ knew nothing of what had passed. Many there were who would have loved to carry her the tidings, but the king's changes had been ~~[illegible]~~ frequent of late, and who would dare to make a mortal enemy of one who might ere many weeks were past have the lives and fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand.

Louis, in his innate selfishness, had been so accustomed to regard every event entirely from the

side of how it would affect himself, that it had never struck him that his long suffering family, who had always yielded to him the absolute obedience which he claimed as his right, would venture to offer any opposition to his new resolution. He was surprised therefore when his brother demanded a private interview that afternoon, and entered his presence, without the complaisant smile and humble air with which he was wont to appear before him.

Monseigneur was a curious travesty of his elder brother. He was shorter, but he wore enormously high boot heels which brought him to a fair stature. In figure he had none of that grace which marked the king, nor had he the elegant hand and foot which had been the delight of sculptors. He was fat, waddled somewhat in his walk, and wore an enormous black wig, which rolled down in rows and rows of curls over his shoulders. His face was longer and darker than the king's, and his nose more prominent, though he shared with his brother the large brown eyes which each had inherited from Anne of Austria. He had none of the simple and yet stately taste which marked the dress of the monarch, but his clothes were all tagged over with fluttering ribbons, which rustled behind him as he walked, and clustered so thickly over his feet as to conceal them from view. Crosses, stars, Jewels, and insignia were scattered broadcast over his person, and the broad blue ribbon of the order of the Holy Ghost was slashed across his coat, and was gathered at the end into a great bow which formed the incongruous support of a diamond-hilted sword. Such was the figure which rolled towards the king, bearing in his right hand his many feathered beever, and appearing in his person as he was in his mind

an absurd burlesque of the monarch.

"Why, Monsieur, you seem less gay than usual this today" said the king with a smile "Your dress indeed is bright, but your brow is clouded. I trust that all is well with Madame, and with the Duc de Chartres?"

"Yes, sire, they are well, but they are sad, like myself, and from the same cause"

"Indeed, and why?"

"Have I ever failed in my duty as your younger brother, sire?"

"Never, Philippe, never!" said the king, laying his hand affectionately upon the other's shoulder "You have set an excellent example to my subjects"

"Then why set a slight upon me?"

"Philippe!"

"Yes, sire, I say it is a slight. We are of royal blood, and our wives are of royal blood also. You married the princess of Spain. I married the princess of Bavaria. It was a condescension, but still I did it. My first wife was the princess of England. How can we admit into a house which has formed such alliances as these a woman who is the widow of a hunchback singer, a mere lampooner, a man whose name is a bye word through Europe"

The king had stared in amazement at his brother, but his anger now overcame his astonishment.

"Upon my word!" he cried "Upon my word! I have said just now that you have been an excellent brother, but I fear that I spoke a little prematurely. And so you take upon yourself to object to the lady whom I select as my wife!"

"I do, sire"

"And by what right?"

"By the right of the family honour, sire, which is as much mine as yours"

"Man!" cried the king furiously "Have you not yet learned that within this kingdom I am the fountain of honour, and that whomever I may honour becomes by that very fact honourable? Were I to take a cinder wench out of the Rue Poissonière, I could at my will raise her up until the highest in France would be proud to bow down before ~~it~~ her. Do you not know this?"

"No, I do not" cried his brother, with all the obstinacy of a weak man who has at last been driven to bay "I look upon it as a slight upon me, and a slight upon my wife"

"Your wife! I have every respect for the Charlotte Elizabeth of Bavaria, but how is she superior to one whose grand father was the dear ~~father~~ friend and comrade in arms of Henry the great. Enough! I will not condescend to argue such a matter with you! Begone, and do not return to my presence until you have learned not to interfere in my affairs"

"For all that my wife shall not know her!" snarled ~~[illegible]~~ Monseigneur, and then as his brother took a fiery step or two towards him he turned and scuttled out of the room as fast as his awkward gait and high heels would allow him.

But the king was to have no quiet that day. If Madame de Maintenon's friends had rallied to her yesterday, her enemies were active today. Monseigneur had hardly disappeared before there rushed into the room a youth who bore upon his rich attire every sign of having just arrived from a dusty journey. He was pale faced and auburn haired, with features which would have been strikingly like

the king's, if it were not that his nose had been disfigured in his youth. The king's face had lighted up at the sight of him, but it darkened again as he hurried forward, and threw himself down at his feet.

"Oh, sire" he cried "Spare us this grief! Spare us this humiliation! I implore you to pause before you do what will bring dishonour upon yourself and upon us"

The king started back from him, and paced angrily up and down the room.

"This is intolerable!" He cried "It was bad from my brother, but worse from my son. You are in a conspiracy with him, Louis. Monsieur has told you to act this part"

The Dauphin rose to his feet, and looked stead fastly at his angry father.

"I have not seen my uncle" he said. "I was at Meudon when I heard this news, this dreadful news, and I sprang upon my horse, sire, and galloped over to implore you to think again before you drag our royal house so low"

"You are insolent, Louis"

"I do not mean to be so, sire. But consider, sire, that my mother was a queen, and that it would be strange indeed if for a stepmother I had a —"

The king raised his hand with a gesture of authority which checked the word upon his lips.

"Silence!" he cried "Or you may say that which ~~would~~ would forever set a gulf between us. Am I to be treated worse than my humblest subject who is allowed to follow his own bent in his private affairs?"

"This is not your own private affair, Sire.

All that you do reflects upon your family. The great deeds of your reign have given a new glory to the name of Bourbon. Oh do not mar it now, sire! I implore it of you upon my bended knees!"

"You talk like a fool" cried his father roughly "I propose to marry a virtuous and charming lady of one ~~led~~ of the oldest noble families of France and you talk as if I were doing something degrading and unheard of. What is your objection to this lady?"

"That she is the daughter of a man whose vices were well known, that her brother is of the worst repute, that she has led the life of an adventuress, is the widow of a deformed scribbler, and that she occupies a menial position in the palace"

The king had stamped with his foot upon the carpet more than once during this frank address, but his anger blazed into fury at its conclusion. "Do you dare" he cried, with flashing eyes "to call the charge of my children a menial position. I say that there is no higher in the kingdom. Go back to Meudon, sir, this instant, and never dare to open your mouth again upon the subject. Away, I say! When in God's good time you are king of this country, you may claim your own way, but until then do not ~~dare~~ venture to cross the plans of one who is both your parent and your ~~king~~ monarch."

The young man bowed low, and walked with dignity from the chamber, but he turned with his hand upon the door.

"The Abbé Fenelon came with me, sire. Is it your pleasure to see him!"

"Away! Away!" cried the king furiously, still striding up and down the room with angry face and flashing eyes. The Dauphin left the Cabinet, but was instantly succeeded by a tall thin priest,

some forty years of age, strikingly handsome, with a pale refined face, large well marked features, and the easy deferential bearing of one who has had a long training in courts. The king turned sharply upon him, and looked hard at him with a distrustful eye.

"Good ~~morning~~ day, Abbé Fenelon" said he "May I ask what the object of this interview is?"

"You have had the condescension, sire, on more than one occasion to ask my humble advice, and even to express yourself afterwards as being pleased that you had acted upon it"

"Well? Well? Well?" growled the monarch.

"If rumour says truly, sire, you are now at a crisis when a word of impartial counsel might be of value to you. Need I say that it would —"

"Tut! tut! Why all these words?" cried the king "You have been sent here by others to try and influence me against Madame de Maintenon"

"Sire, I have had nothing but kindness from that lady. I esteem and honour her more than any lady in France"

"In that case, Abbé, you will, I am sure, be glad to hear that I am about to marry her. Good day, Abbé. I regret that I have not longer time to devote to this very interesting conversation"

"But, sire, —"

"When my mind is in doubt, Abbé, I value your advice very highly. On this occasion my mind is happily not in doubt. I have the honour to wish you a very good day"

The king's first hot anger had died away by now, and had left behind it a cold bitter spirit which was even more formidable to his antagonists. The Abbé, glib of tongue, and fertile of resource, so he

was, fell himself to be silenced and overmatched. He walked backwards, with three long bows, as was the custom of the court, and departed.

But the king had little breathing space. His assailants knew that with persistence they had bent his will before, and they trusted that they might do so again. It was Louvois the minister now who entered the room with his majestic port, his lofty bearing, and his huge wig and his aristocratic face, which however showed some signs of trepidation as it met the baleful eye of the king.

"Well, Louvois, what now?" he asked impatiently. "Has some new state matter arisen?"

"There is but one new state matter which has arisen, sire, but it is of such importance as to banish all others from our mind"

"What then?"

"Your marriage, sire"

"You disapprove of it?"

"Oh, sire, can I help it!"

"Out of my room, sir. Am I to be tormented to death by your importunities! What! you dare to linger when I order you to go!" The king advanced angrily upon the minister, but Louvois suddenly flashed out his rapier. Louis sprang back with alarm and amazement upon his face, but it was the hilt and not the point which was presented to him.

"Pass it through my heart, sire!" he cried, falling upon his knees, his whole great frame in a quiver with emotion "I will not live to see your glory fade!"

"Great Heaven!" shrieked Louis, throwing the sword down upon the ground, and raising his hands to his temples "I believe that this is a conspiracy to drive me mad. Was ever a man so tormented in

this life? This will be a private marriage, man, and it will not affect the state in the least degree. Do you hear me? Have you understood me? What more do you want?"

Louvois gathered himself up and shot his rapier back into it's sheath.

"Your Majesty is determined?" he asked

"Absolutely"

"Then I say no more. I have done my duty" He bowed his head, as one in deep dejection when he departed, but in truth his heart was lightened within him, for he had the King's assurance that the woman whom he hated would, even though his wife, not sit on the throne of the Queens of France.

These repeated attacks ~~had~~, if they had not shaken the king's resolution, had atleast irritated and exasperated him to the utmost. Such a blast of opposition was a new thing to a man whose will had been the one law of the land. It left him ruffled and disturbed, and without requitting his resolution, he still with unreasoning petulance felt inclined to visit the inconvenience to which he had been put, upon those whose advice he had followed. He wore accordingly no very cordial face when the usher in attendance admitted the ~~gaunt and stern~~ venerable figure of Father La Chaise, his confessor.

"I wish you all happiness, sire" said the Jesuit "and I congratulate you from my heart that you have taken the great step which must lead to content both in this world and the next"

"I have had neither happiness nor contentment yet, father" answered the king peevishly "I have never been so pestered in my life. The whole Court has been on it's knees to me to entreat me to change my intention"

The Jesuit looked at him anxiously out of his keen grey eyes.

"Fortunately your Majesty is a man of strong will" said he "and not to be so easily swayed as they think"

"No, no, I did not give an inch. But still it must be confessed that it is very unpleasant to have so many against one. I think that most men would have been shaken"

"Now is the time to stand firm, sire. Satan rages to see you passing out of his power, and he stirs up all his friends and sends all his emissaries to endeavour to detain you"

But the king was not in a humour to be easily consoled.

"Upon my word, father," said he "You do not seem to have much respect for my family. My brother and my son, with the Abbé Fenelon, and the minister of war, are the emissaries to whom you allude."

"Then there is the more credit to your Majesty for having resisted them. You have done nobly, sire. You have earned the praise and the blessing of Holy Church"

"I trust that what I have done is right, father" said the king gravely "I should be glad to see you again later in the evening, but at present I desire a little leisure for solitary thought"

Father La Chaise left the Cabinet with a deep distrust of the king's intentions. It was obvious that the powerful appeals which had been made to him, had shaken, if they had failed to alter, his resolution. What would be the result if more were made! And more would be made, that was as

certain as that darkness follows light. Some master card must be played now which would bring the matter to a crisis at once, for every day of delay was in favour of their opponents. To hesitate was to lose. All must be staked upon one final throw.

~~Chap. XI~~ The Bishop of Meaux was waiting in the anteroom and Father La Chaise in a few brief words let him see the danger of the situation and the means by which they should meet it. Together they sought Madame de Maintenon in her room. She had discarded the sombre widow's dress which she had ~~worn~~ chosen since her first coming to court, and wore now, as more in keeping with her lofty prospects, a rich yet simple costume of white satin with bows of silver serge. A single diamond sparkled in the thick coils of her dark tresses. The change had taken years from a face and figure which had always ~~looked~~ seemed much younger than her age, and as the two plotters looked upon her perfect complexion, her regular features, so calm and yet so full of ~~sensibility and~~ refinement, and the exquisite grace of her figure and bearing, they could not but feel that if they failed in their ends it was not for want of having a perfect tool at their command.

She had risen at their entrance, and her expression showed that she had read upon their faces something of the anxiety which filled their minds. "You have evil news!" she cried.

"No, no, my daughter!" It was the Bishop who spoke "But we must be on our guard against our enemies, who would turn the king away from you if they could"

Her face shone at the mention of her lover. "Ah, you do not know!" she cried "He has made a vow. I would trust him as I would trust

myself. I know that he will be true"

But the Jesuit's intellect was arrayed against the intuition of the woman.

"Our opponents are many and strong" said he, shaking his head "Even if the king remain firm he will be annoyed at every turn, so that he will feel that his life is darker instead of brighter, ~~for~~ save of course, madame, for that brightness which you cannot fail to bring with you. We must bring the matter to an end."

"And how, father?"

"The marriage must be at once!"

"At once!"

"Yes. This very night, if possible."

"Oh, father, you ask too much. The King would never consent to such a proposal"

"It is he that will propose it"

"And why?"

"Because we shall force him to. It is only thus that all opposition can be stopped. When it is done the Court will accept it. Until it is done they will resist it"

"What would you have me do then, father?"

"Resign the king"

"Resign him!" she turned as pale as a lily and looked at him in bewilderment.

"It is the best course, Madame"

"Ah, father, I might have done it last month, last week, even yesterday morning. But now – oh, it would break my heart!"

"Fear not, Madame. We advise you for the best. Go to the king now at once. Say to him that you have heard that he has been subjected to much annoy-ance upon your account, that you cannot bear to

think that you should be a cause of dissension in his own family, and that therefore you will release him from his promise, and will withdraw yourself from the Court for ever"

"Go now? At once?"

"Yes, without loss of an instant"

She cast a light mantle about her shoulders. "I follow your advice" she said "I believe that you are wiser than I. But oh, if he should take me at my word!"

"He will not take you at your word"

"It is a terrible risk"

"But such ~~a game~~ an end as this cannot be ~~played~~ gained without risks. Go, my child, and may heaven's blessing go with you!"

Chap XIII

The King ~~Acts~~ has ideas

The king had remained alone in his Cabinet wrapped in somewhat gloomy thoughts and pondering over the means by which he might carry out his purpose and yet smooth away the opposition which seemed to be so strenuous and so universal. Suddenly there came a gentle tap at the door, and there was the woman who was in his thoughts standing in the twilight before him. He sprang to his feet and held out his hands with a smile which would have reassured her had she doubted his constancy.

"Francoise! You here! Then I have at last a welcome visitor, and it is the first one today"

"Sire, I hear that you have been troubled"

"I have indeed, Francoise"

"But I have a remedy for it"

"And what is that?"

"I shall leave the Court, sire, and you shall think no more of what has passed between

us. I have brought discord where I meant to bring peace. Let me retire to St Cyr, or to the Abbey of Fontevrault, and you will no longer be called upon to make such sacrifices for my sake."

The king turned deathly pale, and clutched at her shawl with a trembling hand, as though he feared that she was about to put her resolution into effect that very instant. For years his mind had accustomed itself to lean upon hers. He had turned to her whenever he needed support, and even when, as in the last weeks, he had broken away from her for a time it was still all important to him to know that she was ~~still~~ there, the faithful friend, ever forgiving, ever soothing, waiting for him with her ready council and sympathy. But that she should leave him now, leave him altogether, such a thought had never occurred to him, and it struck him with a chill of surprised alarm.

"You cannot mean it, Francoise" he cried in a trembling voice "No, no, tis impossible that you are in earnest"

"It would break my heart to leave you, sire, but it breaks it also to think that for my sake you are estranged from your own family and ministers"

"Tut! Am I not the king? Shall I not take my own course without heed to them. No, no, Francoise, you must not leave me! You must stay with me and be my wife" He could hardly speak for agitation, and he still grasped at her dress, to detain her. She had ~~always~~ been precious to him before, but far more so now that there seemed to be a possibility of his losing her. She felt the strength of her position, and used it to the utmost.

"Some time must elapse before our wedding, sire. Yet during all that interval you will be exposed

to these annoyances. How can I be happy when I feel that I have brought upon you so long a period of discomfort"

"But why should it be so long, Francoise?"

"A day would be too long, sire, for you to be unhappy through my fault. It is a misery to me to think of it. Believe me, it would be better that I should leave you"

"Never! You shall not! Why should we even wait a day, Francoise. I am ready. You are ready. Why should we not be married now?"

"At once! Oh, sire!"

"We shall. It is my wish. It is my order. That is my answer to those who would drive me. They shall know nothing of it until it is done, and then let us see which of them will dare to treat my wife with anything but respect. Let it be done secretly, Francoise. I will send in a trusty messenger this very night for the Archbishop of Paris, and I swear that, if all France stand in the way, he shall make us man and wife before he parts."

"Is it your will, sire?"

"It is, and ah, I can see by your eyes that it is yours also! We shall not lose a moment, Francoise! What a blessed thought of mine which will silence their tongues for ever. ~~[illegible]~~. When it is ready they may know, but not before. To your room then, dearest of friends and truest of women! When we meet again it will be to form a band which all this court, and all this king-dom shall not be able to loose"

The king was all on fire with the excitement of this new resolution. He had lost his air of doubt and discontent, and he paced swiftly about the room with a smiling face and shining eyes. Then he touched a small gold bell which summoned Bontems

his private body servant.

"What o'clock is it, Bontems?"

"It is nearly six, sire"

"Hum!" The King considered for some moments. "Do you know where Captain de Catinat is, Bontems?"

"He was in the grounds, sire, but I heard that he would ride back to Paris tonight"

"Does he ride alone?"

"He has one friend with him"

"Who is this friend? An officer of the Guards?"

"No, sire, it is a stranger from over the seas, from America as I understand, who has stayed with him of late and to whom Monsieur de Catinat has been showing the wonders of your Majesty's palace"

"A stranger! So much the better! Go, Bontems, and bring them both to me"

"I trust that they have not started, sire. I will see" He hurried off, and was back in ten minutes in the Cabinet once more

"Well?"

"I have been fortunate, sire. Their horses had been led out and their feet were in the stirrups when I reached them"

"Where are they then?"

"They await your Majesty's orders in the anteroom"

"Show them in, Bontems, and give admission to none, not even to the minister, until they have left me"

To De Catinat an audience with the monarch was a common incident of his duties, but it was with profound astonishment that he learned from Bontems that his friend and companion was included in the order. He was frantically endeavouring to whisper into the young

American's can some precepts and warnings as to what to do and what to avoid, when Bontems reappeared and ushered them into the presence.

It was with a feeling of curiosity not unmixed with awe that Amos Green, to whom ~~[illegible]~~ of Governor Dongan of New York had been the highest embodiment of human power, entered the private chamber of the greatest monarch in Christendom. The magnificence of the antechamber in which he had waited, the velvets, the paintings, the gildings, with the throng of gaily dressed officials and of magnificent Guardsmen had all impressed his imagination and had prepared him for some wondrous figure, robed and crowned, a fit centre for such a scene. As his eyes fell upon a quietly dressed bright eyed man, half a head shorter than himself, with a trim dapper figure and an erect carriage, he could not help glancing round the room to see if this were indeed the monarch, or if it were some other of these endless officials who interposed themselves between him and the outer world. The reverent salute of his companion however showed him that this must indeed be the king, so he bowed and then drew himself erect with the ~~[illegible]~~ simple dignity of a man who had been trained in Nature's school.

"Good evening, Captain De Catinat" said the king with a pleasant smile "Your friend, as I understand, is a stranger to this country. I trust, sir, that you have found something here to interest and to amuse you"

"Yes, your Majesty. I have seen your great city and it's a wonderful one. And my friend has shown me this palace, with it's woods, and it's grounds. When I go back to my own country I will have much to say of what I have seen in your beautiful ~~[illegible]~~ land"

"You speak French, and yet you are not a Canadian"

"No, sire, I am from the English provinces."

The king looked with interest at the powerful figure, the bold features, and the free bearing of the young foreigner, and his mind flashed back to the dangers which the Count de Frontenac had foretold from these same Colonies. If this were indeed a type of his race they must in truth be a people whom it would be better to have as friends than as enemies. His mind however ran at present on other things than statescraft, and he hastened to give De Catinat his orders for the night.

"You will ride into Paris on my service. Your friend can go with you. Two are safer than one when they bear a message of state. I wish you however to wait until nightfall before you start"

"Yes, sire"

"Let none know your errand, and see that none follow you. You know the house of Archbishop Harlay, prelate of Paris?"

"Yes, sire"

"You will bid him drive out hither and be at the North-west ~~side~~ postern by midnight. Let nothing hold him back. Storm or fine he must be here tonight. It is of the first importance."

"He shall have your order, sire"

"Very good. Adieu, Captain! Adieu, Monsieur! I trust that your stay in France may be a pleasant one." He waved his hand, smiling with the fascinating grace which had won so many hearts, and so dismissed the two friends to their new mission.

Chap XIV
The Last ~~Chance~~ card

Madame de Montespan still kept her rooms, uneasy in mind at the king's disappearance, but unwilling to show her anxiety to the Court by appearing among them or by making any inquiry as to what had occurred. While she thus remained in ignorance of the sudden and complete collapse of her fortunes, she had one active and energetic agent who had lost no incident of what had occurred, and who watched her interests with as much zeal as if they were his own. And indeed they were his own for her brother Monsieur de Vivonne had gained everything for which he yearned, money, lands, and preferment, through his sister's notoriety, and he well knew that the fall of her fortunes must be very rapidly followed by that of his own. By nature bold, unscrupulous and ~~inventive~~ resourceful, he was not a man to lose the game without playing it out to the very end with all the energy and cunning of which he was capable. Keenly alert to all that passed he had, from the time that he first heard the rumour of the king's intention, haunted the antechamber and drawn his own conclusions from what he had seen. Nothing had escaped him, the disconsolate faces of Monsieur and of the Dauphin, the visit of Père La Chaise and Bossuet to the lady's room, her return, the triumph which shone in her eyes as she came away from the interview. He had seen Bontems hurry off, and ~~return with~~ summon the Guardsman and his friend. He had heard them order their horses to be brought out in a couple of hours time, and finally from a spy whom he employed among the servants he learned that an unwonted bustle was going forward in Madame de Maintenon's room, that Mademoiselle

Nanon was half wild with excitement, and that two court milliners had been hastily summoned to Madame's apartment. It was only however when he heard from the same servant that a ~~room~~ chamber was to be prepared for the reception that night of the Archbishop of Paris that he understood how urgent was the danger.

Madame de Montespan had spent the evening stretched upon a sofa in the worst possible humour with everyone about her. She had read, but had tossed aside the book. She had written, but had torn up the paper. A thousand fears and suspicions chased each other through her head. What had become of the king then? He had seemed cold yesterday, and his eyes had been forever sliding round to the clock. And today he had not come atall. Was it his gout perhaps? Or was it possible that she was again losing her hold upon him? Surely it could not be that! She turned upon her couch and faced the mirror which flanked the door. The candles had just been lit in her chamber, two score of them, each with silver sconces which threw back their light, until the room was as bright as day. There in the mirror was the brilliant chamber, the deep red ottaman, and the single figure in it's gauzy dress of white and silver. She leaned upon her elbow admiring the deep tint of her own eyes, with their long dark lashes, the white curve of her throat, and the perfect oval of her face. She examined it all carefully, keenly, as though it were her rival that lay before her, but nowhere could she see a ~~trace~~ scratch of time's ~~withering touch~~ malicious marks. She still had her beauty then. And if it had once won the king why should it not suffice to hold him. Ofcourse it would do so. She reproached herself for her fears. Doubtless he was ~~ill~~ indisposed, or perhaps he would come still. Ha, there was the sound of an opening door and of a quick step in her anteroom. Was it

he, or at least his messenger with a note from him?

But no, it was her brother with the haggard eyes and drawn face, of a man who is weighed down with his own evil tidings. He turned as he entered, ~~locked~~ fastened the door, and then striding across the room, locked the other one which led to her boudoir.

"We are safe from interruption" he panted "I have hastened here for every second may be invaluable. Have you heard anything from the king?"

"Nothing" She had sprung to her feet and was gazing at him with a face which was as pale as his own.

"The hour has come for action, Françoise. It is the hour at which the Montemarts have always shown at their best. Do not yield to the blow then, but gather yourself to meet it"

"What is it?" she tried to speak in her natural tone, but only a whisper came to her dry lips.

"The King is about to marry Madame de Maintenon"

"The gouvernante! The widow Scarron! It is impossible!"

"It is certain"

"To marry? Did you say to marry?"

"Yes, he will marry her"

The woman flung out her hands in a gesture of contempt and laughed loud and bitterly.

"You are easily frightened, brother" said she "Ah, you do not know your little sister. Perchance if you were not my brother you might rate my powers more highly. Give me a day, only one little day, and you will see Louis, the proud Louis, down at the hem of my dress to ask my pardon for this slight. I tell you that he cannot break the bonds that hold him. One day is all I ask to bring him back"

"But you cannot have it"

"What ?"

"The marriage is tonight"

"You are mad, Charles"

"I am certain of it." In a few broken sentences he shot out all that he had seen and heard. She listened with a grim face, and hands which clenched ever tighter and tighter as he proceeded. But he had said the truth about the Montemarts. They came of a contentious blood, and were ever at their best at a moment of action. Hate rather than dismay filled her heart as she listened, and the whole energy of her nature gathered and quickened to meet the crisis.

"I will go and see him" she cried, sweeping towards the door

"No, no, Françoise. ~~[illegible]~~ You will ruin everything if you do. Strict orders have been given to the guard to admit no one to the king"

"But I shall insist upon passing them"

"Believe me, sister, it is worse than useless. I have spoken with the officer of the Guard, and the command is a stringent one"

"Ah, I shall manage"

"No, you shall not" He put his back against the door. "I know that it is useless, and I will not have my sister make herself the laughing stock of the court, trying to force her way into the room of a man who repulses her"

His sister's cheeks flushed at the words, and she paused irresolute.

"Had I only a day, Charles, I am sure that I could bring him back to me. There has been some other influence here, that meddlesome Jesuit or the pompous Bossuet perhaps. Only one day to counteract their wiles! Can I not see them waving hell fire before his foolish eyes, as one swings a torch before a bull to turn it. Oh, if I could but balk them tonight, that woman! that cursed

woman! The foul viper which I nursed in my bosom! Oh I had rather see Louis in his grave than married to her! Charles, Charles, it must be stopped, I say it must be stopped! I will give anything, everything, to prevent it!"

"What will you give, my sister?"

She looked at him aghast "What, you do not wish me to buy you!" she said

"No, but I wish to buy others"

"Ha! You see a chance then!"

"One, and one only. But time presses. I want money"

"How much?"

"I cannot have too much. All that you can spare"

With hands which trembled with eagerness she unlocked a secret cupboard in the wall in which she concealed her valuables. A blaze of Jewellery met her brother's eyes as he peered over her shoulder. Great rubies, costly emeralds, deep ruddy beryls, glimmering diamonds, were scattered there in one brilliant shimmering many-coloured heap, the harvest which she had reaped from the king's generosity during ~~the last~~ more than fifteen years. At one side were three drawers, the one over the other. She drew out the lower one. It was full to the brim of glittering Louis d'ors.

"Take what you will!" she said "And now your plan! Quick!"

He stuffed the money in handfuls into the side pockets of his coat. Coins slipped between his fingers and tinkled and wheeled over the floor, but neither cast a glance at them.

"Your plan?" she repeated.

"We must prevent the Archbishop from arriving here. Then the marriage would be postponed

until tomorrow night, and you would have time to act"

"But how prevent him?"

"There are a dozen good rapiers about the Court which are to be bought for less than I carry in one pocket. There is De la Touche, young Turberville, old Major Despard, Raymond de Carnac, and the four Latours. I will gather them together and wait on the road"

"And waylay the archbishop?"

"No, the messengers"

"Oh, excellent. You are a prince of brothers! If no message reach Paris we are saved. Go, go, do not lose a moment, my dear Charles!"

"It is very well, Françoise, but what are we to do with them when we get them? We may lose our heads over the matter, it seems to me. After all they are the king's messengers, and we can scarce pass our swords through them"

"No?"

"There would be no forgiveness for that"

"But consider that before the matter is looked into I shall have regained my influence with the king"

"All very fine, my little sister, but how long is your influence to last? A pleasant life for us if, at every ~~second week~~ change of favour we have to fly the country. No, no, Francoise, the most that we can do is to detain the messengers"

"Where can you detain them?"

"I have thought of that. There is the Castle of the Marquis de Montespan at Portillac"

"Of my husband!"

"Precisely"

"Of my most bitter enemy. Oh, Charles, you are not serious"

"On the contrary, I was never more so. The Marquis was away in Paris yesterday, and has not yet

returned. Where is the ring with his arms?"

She hunted among her Jewels and picked out a gold ring with a broad engraved face.

"This will be our key. When good Marceau the steward sees it every dungeon in the castle will be at our disposal. It is that or nothing. There is no other place where we can hold them safe"

"But when my husband returns?"

"Ah, he may be a little puzzled as to his captives. And the complaisant Marceau may have an evil quarter of an hour. But that may not be for a week, and by that time, my little sister, I have confidence enough in you to think that you really may have finished the campaign. Not an other word, for every moment is of value. Adieu, Françoise! We shall not be conquered without a struggle. I will send a message to you tonight to let you know how fortune uses us." He took her fondly in his arms, kissed her, and then hurried from the room.

For hours after his departure she paced up and down with noiseless steps upon the deep soft carpet, her hands still clenched, her eyes flaming, her whole soul wrapped and consumed with Jealousy and hatred of her rival. Ten struck, and eleven and midnight, but still she waited, fierce and eager, straining her ears for every foot-fall which might be the herald of news. At last it came. She heard the quick step in the passage, the tap at the anteroom door and the whispering of her black page. Quivering with impatience she rushed in and took the note herself from the dusty Cavalier who had brought it. It was but six words scrawled roughly upon a wisp of dirty paper, but it brought the colour back to her cheeks and the smile to her lips. It was her brother's writing, and it ran "The Archbishop will not come tonight."

Chap. XV

The Midnight ~~Messengers~~ Mission.

De Catinat in the meanwhile was perfectly aware of the importance of the mission which had been assigned to him. The secrecy which had been enjoined by the king, and his evident excitement, and the nature of his orders all confirmed the rumours which were already beginning to buzz round the court. He knew enough too of the intrigues and antagonisms with which the Court was full, to understand that every precaution was necessary in carrying out his instructions. He waited therefore until night had fallen before ordering his soldier servant to bring round the two horses to one of the less public gates of the Grounds. As he and his friend walked together to the ~~postern~~ spot he gave the young American a rapid sketch of the situation at the Court, and of the chance that their nocturnal ride might be an event which would affect the future history of France.

"I like your king" said Amos Green "and I am glad to ride in his service. He is a slip of a man to be head of a great nation, but he has the eye of a chief. If one met him alone in a Maine forest one would know him as a man who was different to his fellows. Well, I am glad that he is going to marry again, though it's a great house for any woman to have to look after"

De Catinat smiled at his comrade's idea of a Queen's duties.

"Are you armed?" he asked "~~Have~~ You ~~you your~~ have no sword or pistols?"

"No, if I may not carry my gun I had rather not be troubled by ~~[illegible]~~ tools that I have never learned to use. I have

my knife. But why do you ask?"

"Because there may be danger?"

"And how?"

"Many have an interest in stopping this marriage. All the first men of the kingdom are bitterly against it. If they could stop us, they would stop it, for tonight at least"

"But I thought it was secret"

"There is no such thing at a Court. There is the dauphin or the king's brother, either of them, or any of their friends would be right glad that we should be in the Seine before we reached the Archbishop's house this night. But who is this?"

A burly figure had loomed up through the gloom on the path upon which they were going. As it approached a coloured lamp dangling from one of the trees, shone upon the Blue and silver of an Officer of the Guards. It was Major de Bressac of De Catinat's own regiment.

"Hullo! Whither away?" he asked.

"To Paris, Major"

"I go there myself within an hour. Will you not wait that we may go together"

"I am sorry, but I ride on a matter of urgency. I must not lose a minute"

"Very good. Good night and a pleasant ride"

"Is he a trusty man our friend the Major?" asked Amos Green, glancing back, ~~as the Major continued upon his way~~.

"True as steel"

"Then I would have a word with him"

The American hurried back along the way that they had come, while De Catinat stood chafing at this unnecessary delay. It was a full five minutes before

his companion joined him, and the ~~hot~~ fiery blood of the French soldier was hot with impatience and anger.

"I think that perhaps you had best ride into Paris at your leisure, my friend" said he "If I go upon the king's service I cannot be delayed whenever the whim takes you"

"I am sorry" answered the other, quietly "I had something to say to your Major and I thought that maybe I might not see him again"

"Well, here are the horses" said the Guardsman as he pushed open the postern gate, ~~and~~ "Have you fed and watered them, Jacques?"

"Yes, my Captain" answered the man who stood at their head.

"Boot and saddle then, friend Green, and we shall not draw rein again until we see the lights of Paris in front of us"

The soldier groom peered through the darkness after them with a sardonic smile upon his face. "You won't draw rein, won't you?" he muttered as he turned away "Well, we shall see about that, my Captain, we shall see about that"

For a mile or more the comrades galloped along, neck to neck and knee to knee. A wind had sprung up from the westward, and the heavens ~~were~~ was covered with heavy gray clouds, which drifted swiftly across it, a crescent moon peeping fitfully from time to time between the rifts. Even during these moments of brightness the road, ~~be~~ shadowed as it was by heavy trees, was very dark, but when the light was shut off it was hard, but for the loom upon either side, to tell where ~~the~~ it

~~passed~~ lay. De Catinat at last found it so, and he peered anxiously over his horses ears and stooped his face to the mane in his efforts to see his way

"What do you make of the road?" he asked at last

"It looks as if a good many carriage wheels had passed over it today"

"What! Mon Dieu! Do you mean to say that you can see carriage wheels there?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Why, man, I cannot see the road at all"

Amos Green laughed heartily. "When you have travelled in the woods by night as often as I have" said he "when to show a light may mean to lose your hair, one comes to learn to use ones eyes"

"Then you had best ride on and I shall keep just behind you. So! Hullo, what is the matter now?"

There had been the sudden sharp snap of something breaking and the American had reeled for an instant in the saddle.

"It's one of my stirrup leathers. It has fallen"

"Can you find it?"

"Yes, but I can ride as well without it. Let us push on"

"Very good. I can just see you now"

They had galloped for about five minutes in this fashion, De Catinat's horse's head within a few feet of the other's tail, when there was a second snap and the Guardsman rolled out of the saddle on to the ground. He kept his grip of the reins however, and was up in an instant at his horses head, sputtering out oaths as only an angry Frenchman can.

"A thousand thunders of heaven!" he cried "What was it that happened then?"

"Your leather has gone too"

"Two stirrup leathers in five minutes. It is not possible"

"It is not possible that it should be chance" said the American gravely, swinging himself off his horse "Why, what is this? My other leather is cut and hangs only by a thread"

"And so does mine. I can feel it when I pass my hand along. Have you a tinder box? Let us strike a light"

"No, no, the man who is in the dark is in safety. I let my enemy strike lights. We can see all that is needful to us."

"My rein is cut also"

"And so is mine"

"And the girth of my saddle"

"It is a wonder that we came so far with whole bones. Now who has played us this little trick?"

"Who could it be but that rogue, Jacques! He has had the horses in his charge. By my faith he shall know what the strapado means when I see Versailles again"

"But why should he do it?"

"Ah, he has been set on to it. He has been a tool in the hands of those who wished to hinder our Journey"

"Very like. But they must have had some reason behind. They knew well that to cut our straps would not prevent us from reaching Paris, since we could ride bare-back, or for that matter could run it if need be"

"They hoped to break our necks"

"One neck they might break, but scarce

those of two, since the fate of the one would warn the other"

"Well then what do you think that they meant?" cried De Catinat impatiently "For heaven's sake let us come to some conclusion for every minute is of importance"

But the other was not to be hurried out of his cool methodical fashion of speech and of thought.

"They could not have thought to stop us" said he "What did they mean then? They could only have meant to delay us. And why should they wish to delay us. What could it matter to them if we gave our message an hour or two sooner, or an hour or two later. It could not matter"

"For heaven's sake—!" broke in De Catinat impetuously

But Amos Green went on hammering the matter slowly out. "Why should they wish to delay us then? There's only one reason that I can see. In order to give other folk time to get in front of us and stop us. That is it, Captain. I'd lay you a beaver skin to a rabbit pelt that I'm on the track. There's been a party of a dozen horsemen along this ground since the dew began to fall. If we were delayed they would have time to form their plans before we came"

"By my faith, you may be right" said De Catinat thoughtfully "What would you propose?"

"That we ride back and go by some less direct way"

"It is impossible. We should have to ride back to the Meudon cross roads, and then it would add ten miles to our Journey"

"It is better to get there an hour later

than not to get there atall"

"Pshaw, we are surely not to be turned from our path by a mere guess. There is the St Germain crossroad about a mile below. When we reach it we can strike to the right along the south side of the River, and so change our course"

"But we may not reach it"

"If anyone bars our way we shall know how to treat with them"

"You would fight them?"

"Yes"

"What! With a dozen of them?"

"A hundred, if we are on the king's errand"

Amos Green shrugged his shoulders.

"You are surely not afraid"

"Yes, I am, mighty afraid. Fightings good enough when there's no help for it. But I call it a fool's plan to ride straight into a trap when you might go round it"

"You may do what you like" said De Catinat angrily "My father was a gentleman, the owner of a thousand arpents of land, and his son is not going to flinch in the king's service"

"My father" answered Amos Green "was a merchant, the owner of a thousand skunk skins, and his son knows a fool when he sees one"

"You are insolent, sir" cried the Guardsman "We can settle this matter at some more fitting opportunity. At present I continue my mission, and you are very welcome to turn back to Versailles if you are so inclined" He raised his hat with punctilious politeness, sprang on to his horse, and rode on down the road.

Amos Green hesitated a little, and then, mounting, he soon overtook his companion. The latter

however was still in no very sweet temper and rode with a rigid neck without a glance or a word for his comrade. Suddenly however his eyes caught something in the gloom which brought a smile back to his face. Away in front of them between two dark tree clumps, lay a vast number of shimmering glittering yellow points as thick as flowers in a garden. They were the lights of Paris.

"See!" he cried, pointing "There is the City, and close here must be the St Germain road. We shall take it so as to avoid any danger"

"Very good! But I should not ride too fast when your girth may break at any moment"

"Nay, come on, we are close to our Journeys end. The St Germain road opens just round this corner, and then we shall see our way for the lights will guide us"

He cut his horse with his whip, and the two galloped together round the curve. Next instant they were both down in one wild heap of tossing heads and struggling hoofs, We Cotinat partly covered by his horse, and his comrade hurled twenty paces, where he lay silent and motionless in the centre of the road.

[21]

Chap XVI.

When the devil drives.

Monsieur de Vivonne had laid his ambuscade with discretion. With a ~~car~~ closed carriage and a band of chosen ruffians he had left the palace a good half hour before the King's messengers, and by the aid of his sister's gold he had managed that their Journey should not be a very rapid one. On reaching the branch road he had ordered the coachman to drive some little distance ~~up~~ along it, and had tethered all the horses to a fence under his charge. He had then stationed one of the band as a sentinel some distance up the ~~road~~ main highway to flash a ~~signal~~ light when the two couriers were approaching. A stout cord had been fastened ~~some~~ eighteen inches from the ground to the trunk of a wayside sapling, and on receiving the signal the other end was tied to a gate post upon the further side. The two cavaliers could not possibly see it, coming, as it did, at the very curve of the road, and as a consequence their horses ~~came~~ fell heavily to the ground, and brought them down with them. In an instant the dozen ruffians who had lurked in the shadow of the trees, sprang out upon them sword in hand, but there was no movement from either of their victims. De Catinat lay breathing heavily, one leg under his horses neck, and the blood trickling in a thin stream down his pale face and falling, drop by drop, on to his silver shoulder straps. Amos Green was unwounded, but his injured girth had given way in the fall, and he had been hurled from his horse onto the hard road with a violence which

had driven every particle of breath from his body.

Monsieur de Vivonne had lit a lantern and had flashed it upon the faces of the two unconscious men.

"This is a bad business, Major Despard" said he, to the man next him "I believe that they are both gone"

"Tut! tut!" By my soul men did not die like that when I was young" answered the other, leaning forward his fierce grizzled face into the light of the lantern "I've been cast from my horse as often as there are tags to my doublet but save for the snap of a bone or two I never had any harm from it. Pass your rapier under the third rib of the horses, De La Touche, they will never be fit to set hoof to ground again."

Two sobbing gasps, and the ~~sound~~ third of their straining necks falling back to earth told that the two steeds had come to the end of their troubles.

"Where is Latour?" asked Monsieur de Vivonne. "Achille Latour has studied medicine at Montpellier. Where is he?"

"Here I am, your excellency. It is not for me to boast but I am as handy a man with a lancet as with a rapier, and it was an evil day for some sick folk when first I took to buff and bandolier. Which would you have me look to?"

"This one in the road"

The trooper bent over Amos Green. "He is not long for this world" said he "I can tell it by the catch of his breath"

"And what is his injury?"

"A subluxation of the epigastrium. Ah, the words of learning will still come to my tongue

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but it is hard to put into common terms. Methinks that it were well for me to pass my dagger through his throat, for his end is very near."

"Not for your life!" cried the leader "If he die without wound they cannot lay it to our charge. Turn now to the other."

The man bent over De Catinat and placed his hand upon his heart. As he did so the soldier heaved a long sigh, opened his eyes, and gazed about him with the face of one who knows neither where he is, nor how he came there. De Vivonne who had drawn his hat down over his eyes, and muffled the lower part of his face in his mantle, ~~handed him~~ took out his flask, and poured a little of the contents down ~~his~~ the injured man's throat. In an instant a dash of colour ~~back~~ came back into the guardsman's bloodless cheeks, and the light of memory into his eyes. He struggled up onto his feet, and strove furiously to push away those who held him, but his head still swam, and he could scarce hold himself erect.

"I must to Paris" he gasped "I must to Paris. It is the King's mission. You stop me at ~~your~~ your peril"

"He has no hurt save a scratch" said the ex-doctor.

"Then hold him fast! And first carry the dying man to the carriage"

The lantern threw but a small ring of yellow light, so that when it had been carried over to De Catinat, Amos Green was left lying in the shadow. Now they brought the light back to where the young man lay. But there was no sign of him. He was gone.

For a moment the little group of ruffians stood staring, the ~~yellow~~ light of their lantern streaming up upon their plumed hats, their fierce eyes, and savage faces. Then a burst of oaths broke from them and De Vivonne caught the false doctor by the throat and hurling him down would have choked him upon the spot, had the others not dragged them apart.

"You lying dog!" he cried "Is this your skill! The man has fled and we are ruined"

"He has done it in his death struggle" gasped the other hoarsely, sitting up and rubbing his throat "I tell you that the ~~man~~ he was in extremis. He cannot be far off"

"That is true. He cannot be far off" cried de Vivonne. "He has neither horse nor arms. You, Despard and Raymond de Carnac, guard the other that he play us no trick. Do you ~~Lacour~~ De Vitry, and you Turberville, ride down the road and wait by the South gate. If he enter Paris at all he must come in that way. If you get him tie him before you on your horse, and bring him to the rendezvous. In any case it matters little, for he is a stranger, this fellow, and only here by chance. Now lead the other to the carriage, and we shall get ~~off~~ away before an alarm is given."

The two horsemen rode off in pursuit of the fugitive, and De Catenat, still struggling desperately to escape was dragged down the St Germain ~~carriage~~ road, and thrust into the carriage, which had waited at some distance while these incidents were being enacted. Three of the horsemen rode ahead, the coachman was curtly ordered to follow them, and De

Yvonne, having dispatched one of the band with a note to his sister, followed after the coach with the remainder of his ~~followers~~ desperados.

The unfortunate guardsman had now entirely recovered his senses, and found himself with a strap round his ankles and another round his wrists, a captive inside a moving prison which lumbered heavily along the country road. He had been stunned by the shock of his fall, and his leg was badly bruised by the weight of his horse, but the cut on his forehead was a mere trifle, and the bleeding had already ceased. His mind however pained him more than his body. He sank his head into his pinioned hands, and stamped madly with his feet, rocking himself to and fro in his despair. What a fool, a treble fool, he had been, he an old soldier who had seen something of war, to walk with open eyes into such a trap! The king had chosen him of all men as a trusty messenger, and yet he had failed ~~him~~ – and failed ~~him~~ so ignominiously without shot fired, or sword drawn. He was warned too, warned by a young man who knew nothing of court intrigue, and who was guided only by the wits which Nature had given him. De Catinat dashed himself down upon the leather cushions in the agony of his thoughts.

But then came a return of that common sense which lies so very closely beneath the impetuosity of the Celt. The matter was done now, and he must see if it could not be mended. Amos Green had escaped. That was one grand point in his favour. And Amos Green had heard the king's message and realised it's importance. It was true that he knew nothing of Paris, but surely a man who could pick his way at night through the Forests of Maine would not be balked in finding so well known a house as

that of the Archbishop of Paris. But then there came a sudden thought which turned de Calinals heart to lead. The City gates were locked at eight o'clock in the evening. It was now nearly nine. It would have been easy for him, whose uniform was a voucher for his message, to gain his way through. But how could Amos Green, a foreigner and a civilian hope to pass. It was impossible, clearly impossible, and yet somehow in spite of the impossibility he still clung to a vague hope that a man so full of energy and resource might find some way out of the difficulty.

And then the thought of escape occurred to his mind. Might he not even now be in time perhaps to carry his own message. Who were these men who had seized him? They had said nothing to give him a hint as to whose tools they were. Monsieur and the Dauphin occurred to his mind. Probably one or the other. He had only recognised one of them, old Major Despard, a ~~so~~ man who frequented the low wine shops of Versailles, and whose sword was ever at the disposal of the longest purse. And whither were these people taking him ~~to~~? It might be to his death, but if they wished to do away with him why should they have brought him back to consciousness, and why this carriage and drive! Full of curiosity he peered out of the windows.

A horseman was riding close up on either side, but there was glass in front of the carriage and, through this, he could gain some idea as to his whereabouts. ~~On~~ The clouds had cleared now, and the moon was shining brightly, bathing the whole wide landscape in it's shimmering light. To the right lay the open country, broad plains with clumps of woodland, and the towers of castles pricking out from above the groves. A heavy bell was ringing in some monastery, and it's dull booming came and went

with the breeze. On the left, but far away lay the glimmer of Paris. They were leaving it rapidly behind. Whatever his destination it was neither the Capital, nor yet Versailles.

Then he began to count the chances of escape. His sword had been removed and his pistols were still in the holsters beside his unfortunate horse. He was unarmed then, even if he could free himself, and his captors were atleast a dozen in number. There were three on ahead, riding abreast along the white moonlit road. Then there was one ~~and~~ on each side, and he should judge by the clatter of hoofs that there could not be fewer than half a dozen behind. That would make exactly twelve, including the coachman, too many surely for an unarmed man to hope to baffle. At the thought of the coachman he had glanced through the glass front at the broad back of the man, and he had suddenly, in the glimmer of the carriage ~~light~~ lamp, observed something which struck him with horror.

The man was evidently desperately wounded. It was strange indeed that he could still sit there and flick his whip with so terrible an injury. In the back of his great ~~blue~~ red coat, just under the left shoulder-blade was a gash in the cloth, where some weapon had passed, and all round was a wide patch of dark scarlet which told it's own tale. Nor was this all. As he raised his ~~handsome~~ whip the moonlight shone upon his hand and de Catenat saw with a shudder that it also was splashed and clogged with blood. The guardsman craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the man's face, but his broad brimmed hat was drawn low, and the high collar of his driving coat was raised, so that his features were in the shadow. This silent man in front of him with the horrible marks upon his person sent a chill to de Catenat's valiant heart, and he

muttered ~~one~~ one of Marot's huguenot psalms, for who but the foul fiend himself would drive a coach with those crimsoned hands and with a sword driven through his body.

And now they had come to a spot where the main road ran onwards, but a smaller side track wound away down the steep slope of a hill, and so in the direction of the Seine. The advance guard had kept to the main road, and the two horsemen on either side were trotting in the same direction, when to de Catinat's amazement the carriage suddenly swerved ~~to one side~~, and in an instant plunged down the steep incline, the two stout horses galloping at their topmost speed, the coachman standing up and lashing furiously at them, and the clumsy old vehicle bounding along in a way which threw him backwards and forwards from one seat to the other. Behind ~~him~~, he could hear a shout of consternation from the escort, and then the rush of galloping hoofs. Away they flew, the road side poplars dancing past at either window, the horses thundering along with their stomachs to the earth, and that demon driver still waving those horrible red hands in the moonlight, and screaming out to the maddened steeds. Sometimes the carriage jolted one way, sometimes another, swaying furiously and running on two side wheels as though it must every instant go over. And yet fast as they went their pursuers went faster still. The rattle of ~~their~~ hoofs was at their very ~~heels~~ back, and suddenly at one of the windows there ~~shot~~ came into view the red distended nostrils of a horse. Slowly it drew forward, the muzzle, the eye, the ears, the mane, coming into sight as the rider still gained upon them, and then above them the fierce face of Desprard and the gleam of a brass pistol barrel.

"At the horse, Despard, at the horse!" cried an authoritative voice from behind.

The pistol flashed and the coach lurched over as one of the horses gave a convulsive spring. But the driver still shrieked and lashed with his whip, while the carriage bounded onwards.

And now the road turned a sudden curve and there right in front of them not a hundred paces away was the Seine running cold and still in the moonshine. The bank on either side of the highway ran straight down without any break to the waters edge. There was no sign of a bridge, and a black shadow in the centre of the stream showed where the ferry boat was returning after conveying some belated travellers across. The driver never hesitated but gathering up the reins he urged the frightened creatures into the river. They hesitated however when they first felt the cold water about their hocks, and even as they did so one of them with a low moan fell over upon her side. Despard's bullet had found it's mark. Like a flash the coachman hurled himself from the box and plunged into the stream, but the pursuing horsemen were all round him before this, and half a dozen hands had seized him ere he could reach deep water and had dragged him to the bank. His broad hat had been struck off in the struggle and de Catinat saw his face in the moonshine. Great heavens! It was Amos Green.

Chap XVII

The dungeon of Portillac

The desperadoes were as much astonished as was de Catinat when they found that they had recaptured in this extraordinary manner the messenger whom they had given up for lost. A volley of oaths and exclamations broke from them as on tearing off the huge red coat of the coachman they disclosed the sombre dress of the young American.

"A thousand thunders!" cried one "and this is the man whom that devil's brat Latour would make out to be dead"

"But how came he here?"

"And where is Etienne Arnaud?"

"He has stabbed Etienne. See the great cut in the coat"

"Aye, and see the colour of his hand. He has stabbed him and taken his coat and hat."

"What, while we were all within stone's cast"

"Aye, there is no other way out of it"

"By my soul!" cried old Despard "I had never much love for old Etienne, but I have emptied a cup of wine with him before now, and I shall see that he has Justice ~~now~~. Let us cast these reins round the fellow's neck and hang him upon this tree"

Several pairs of hands were already unbuckling the harness of the dead horse when de Vivonne pushed his way into the little group and with a few curt words checked their intended violence.

"It is as much as your lives are worth to touch him" said he.

"But he has slain Etienne Arnaud"

"That score may be settled afterwards. Tonight

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he is the king's messenger. Is the other all safe?"

"Yes, he is here"

"Tie this man and put him in beside him." Unbuckle the traces of the dead horse. So! Now, de Carnac, fasten your crew into the shafts. You can mount the box and drive, for we have not very far to go"

The changes were rapidly made, Amos Green was thrust in beside de Calinat, and the carriage was soon toiling up the steep incline which it had come down so precipitately. The American had said not a word since his capture, and had remained absolutely stolid with his hands crossed over his chest whilst his fate was under discussion. Now that he was alone once more with his comrade however he frowned and muttered like a man who feels that fortune has used him badly.

"Those infernal horses!" he grumbled "Why an American horse would have taken to the water like a duck. Many a time have I swum my old stallion Sagamore across the Hudson. Once over the river we would have had a clear lead to Paris"

"My dear friend" cried de Calinat, laying his manacled hands upon those of his comrade "Can you forgive me for speaking as I did upon the way from Versailles?"

"Tut, man, I never gave it a thought."

"You were right a thousand times, and I was, as you said, a fool – a blind obstinate fool. How nobly you have stood by me. But how came you there? Never in my life have I been so astonished as when I saw your face."

Amos Green chuckled to himself. "I thought that maybe it would be a surprise to you if you knew who was driving you" said he "When I was thrown from my horse I lay quiet, partly because I wanted to get a grip of my breath,

and partly because it seemed to me to be more healthy to lie than to stand with all those swords clinking in your ear. Then they all got round you, and I rolled into the ditch, crept along it, got on the cross road in the shadow of the trees, and was beside the carriage before ever they knew that I was gone. I saw in a flash that there was only one way by which I could be of use to you. The coachman was leaning round with his head turned to see what was going on behind him. I out with my knife, sprang up on the front wheel, and stopped his tongue forever."

"What! Without a sound!"

"I have not lived among the Indians for nothing"

"And then?"

"I pulled him down into the ditch, and I got into his coat and his hat. I did not scalp him"

"Scalp him! Great heavens! Such things are only done among savages"

"Ah, I thought that maybe it was not the custom of the country. I am glad now that I did not do it. I had hardly got the reins before they were all back and bundled you into the coach. I was not afraid of their seeing me, but I was scared lest I should not know which road to take, and so they set them on the trail. But they made it easy to me by sending some of their riders in front, so I did well until I saw that bye-track, and made a run for it. We'd have got away too if that rogue hadn't shot the horse, and if the beasts had faced the water"

The guardsman again pressed his comrade's hands. "You have been as true to me as hilt to blade" said he "It was a bold thought and a bold deed"

"And what now?" asked the American

"I do not know who these men are, and I do not know whither they are taking us"

"To their villages likely, to burn us"

De Catinat laughed in spite of his anxiety "You will have it that we are back in America again" said he "They don't do things in that way in France."

"They seem free enough with hanging in France. I tell you I felt like a smoked out coon when that trace was round my neck."

"I fancy that they are taking us to some place where they can shut us up until this business blows over"

"Well, they'll need to be smart about it"

"Why"

"Else maybe they won't find us here when they want us"

"What do you mean?"

For answer the American with a twist and a wriggle drew his two hands apart and held them in front of his comrades face:

"Bless you, it is the first thing they teach the papooses in an Indian wigwam. I've got out of a Huron's thongs of raw hide before now; and it ain't very likely that a stiff stirrup leather will hold me. Put your hands out!" With a few dexterous twists he loosened de Catinat's bonds until he was also able to slip his hands free. "Now for your feet, if you'll put them up. They'll find that we are easier to catch than to hold."

But at that moment the carriage began to slow down, and the clank of the hoofs of the riders in front of them died suddenly away. Peeping through the windows the prisoners saw a huge dark building stretching in front of them, so high and so broad that the night shrouded it in upon every side. A great archway hung above them, and the lamps shone on the rude wooden gate, studded with ponderous clamps and nails. In the upper part of the door was a small square iron grating, and through this they could catch a glimpse of the gleam of a lantern,

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and of a bearded face which looked out at them. De Vivonne, standing in his stirrups craned his head up towards the grating so that the two men most interested could hear ~~nothing~~ little of the conversation which followed. They saw only that the horseman held a gold ring up in the air, and that the ~~head~~ face above which had begun by shaking and frowning, was now nodding and smiling. An instant later the head disappeared, the ~~door~~ gate swung open with a screaming of hinges, and the carriage drove on into the courtyard beyond, leaving the escort, with the exception of de Vivonne outside. ~~Dismounted~~. As the horses pulled up a knot of rough fellows clustered round ~~it, the door was flung open~~, and the two prisoners were dragged roughly out. In the light of the torches which flared around them they could see that they were hemmed in by high turretted walls upon every side. A bulky man with a bearded face, the same whom they had seen at the grating was standing in the centre of the group of armed men issuing his orders.

"To the upper dungeon, Simon!" he cried "And see that they have two bundles of straw and a loaf of bread until we learn our master's will"

"I know not who your master may be" said de Catinat "but I would ask you by what warrant he dares to stop two messengers of the king while travelling in his service"

"By Saint Denis if my master play the king a trick it will but be tit and tit" ~~said~~ the stout man answered with a grin "But no more talk! Away with them, Simon, and you answer to me for their safe-keeping"

It was in vain that de Catinat raved and threatened, invoking the most terrible ~~threats~~ menaces upon all who were concerned in detaining him. Two stout knaves

thrusting him from behind and one dragging in front forced him through a narrow ~~door~~ gate and along a stone-flagged passage, a small man in black buckram with a bunch of keys in one hand and a swinging lantern in the other leading the way. Their ankles had been so tied that they could but take steps of a foot in length. Shuffling along they made their way ~~along~~ down three successive corridors, and through three doors, each of which was locked and barred behind them. Then they ascended a winding stone stair, hollowed out in the centre by the feet of generations of prisoners and of gaolers, and finally they were thrust into a small square dungeon, and two trusses of straw were thrown in after them. An instant later a heavy key turned in the lock, and they were left to their own meditations.

Very grim and dark those meditations were in the case of De Catenat. A stroke of good luck had made him at Court, and now this other of ill ~~luck~~ fortune had ~~made~~ distinguished him. It would be in vain that he should plead his own powerlessness. ~~Louis was not a man~~ He knew his royal master well. He was a man who was munificent when his orders were obeyed, and inexorable when they miscarried. No excuse availed with him. An unlucky man was as abhorrent to him as a negligent one. In this great crisis the king had trusted him with an all-important message, and that message had not been delivered. ~~Nothing~~ What could save him now from disgrace and from ruin! He cared nothing for the dim dungeon in which he found himself, nor for the uncertain fate which hung over his head, but his heart turned to lead when he thought of his blasted career, and of the triumph of those whose jealousy had been aroused by his rapid promotion. There were his people in Paris too, ~~Adele whom he loved~~ Adèle, his sweet, his old uncle who had been as good as a father

to him. What protector would they have in their troubles now that he had lost the power which might have shielded them! How long would it be before they were exposed once more to the brutalities of Dalbert and his dragoons! He clenched his teeth at the thought and threw himself down with a groan upon the litter of straw, dimly visible in the faint light which streamed through the single window.

But his energetic comrade had yielded to no feeling of despondency. The instant that the clang of the prison door had assured him that he was safe from interruption he had slipped off the bonds which held him, and had felt all round the walls and flooring to see what manner of place this might be. His search had ended in the discovery of a small fireplace at one corner, and of two great clumsy billets of wood which seemed to have been left there to serve as pillows for the prisoners. Having satisfied himself that the chimney was so small that it was utterly impossible to pass even his head up it he drew the two blocks of wood over to the window and was able by placing one above the other and standing on tiptoe on the highest to reach the bars which guarded ~~the window~~ it. Drawing himself up, and fixing one toe in an inequality of the wall, he ~~was able~~ managed to look out onto the courtyard which they had just quitted. ~~He was~~ The carriage and de Vivonne were ~~just~~ passing out through the gate as he looked, and he heard a moment later the slam of the heavy door, and the clatter of hoofs from the troop of horsemen outside. The seneschal and his retainers had disappeared, the torches too were gone, and save for the measured tread of a pair of sentinels in the yard twenty feet beneath him all was silent throughout the great castle.

And a very great castle it was! Even as he hung there with straining hands his eyes were running in admiration and amazement over the

huge walls in front of him, with its fringe of turrets and pinnacles and ~~machicolated~~ battlements all lying so still and cold in the moonlight. Strange thoughts will slip into a man's head at the most unlikely moments. He remembered suddenly a bright summer day over the water when first he had come down from Albany, and how his father had met him on the wharf by the Hudson, and had taken him through the water gate to see Peter Stuyvesant's house, as a sign of how great this city was which had passed from the Dutch to the English. Why, Peter Stuyvesant's house, and Peter Stuyvesant's Bowery villa put together would not make one wing of this huge pile, which was itself a mere doghennel beside the mighty palace at Versailles. He would that his father were here now, and then on second thoughts he would not, for it came back to him that he was a prisoner in a far land and that his sight seeing was being done through the bars of a dungeon window.

The window was large enough to pass his body through if it were not for those bars. He shook them and hung his weight upon them, but they were as thick as his thumb and firmly welded. Then getting some small hold for his other foot he supported himself by one hand while he picked with his knife at the setting of the iron. It was cement, as smooth as glass and as hard as marble. His knife turned when he tried to loosen it. But there was still the stone. It was sandstone, not so very hard. If he could cut grooves in it he might be able to draw out bars, cement and all. He sprang down to the floor again, and was thinking how he should best set to work when a groan drew his attention to his companion.

"You seem sick, friend" said he

"Sick in mind" moaned the other "Oh, the cursed fool that I have been. It maddens me!"

"Something on your mind!" said Amos Green, sitting down upon his billets of wood "What was it then?"

The guardsman made a movement of impatience. "What was it? How can you ask me when you know, as well as I do, the wretched failure of my mission. It was the king's wish that the Archbishop should marry them. The king's wish is ~~not~~ ~~a~~ ~~thing~~ the law. It must be the Archbishop or none. He should have been at the Palace by now. Ah, my God, I can see the king's Cabinet, I can see him waiting, I can see Madame waiting, I can hear them speak of the unhappy de Catinat—!" He buried his ~~face~~ hands in his ~~face~~ hands once more.

"I see all that" said the American stolidly "and I see something more."

"What then?"

"I see the Archbishop tying them up together"

"The Archbishop! You are raving"

"Maybe. But I see him"

"He could not be at the palace"

"On the contrary, he reached the palace about half an hour ago"

De Catinat sprang to his feet "At the palace!" he screamed "Then who gave him the message?"

"I did" said Amos Green.

Chap XVIII

A Night of surprises

If the American had expected to surprise or delight his companion by this curt announcement he was wofully disappointed, for de Catinat approached him with a face which was full of sympathy and trouble, and laid his hand caressingly upon his shoulder

"My dear friend" said he "I have been selfish and thoughtless. I have ~~thought~~ made too much of my own little troubles and too little of what you have gone through for me. That fall from your horse has shaken you more than you think. Lie down upon this straw and see if a little sleep may not —"

"I tell you that the bishop is there" cried Amos Green impatiently.

"Quite so. There is water in this Jug, and if I dip my scarf into it and tie it round your brow —"

"Man alive, don't you hear me! The bishop is there"

"He is. He is" said de Catinat soothingly "He is most certainly there. I trust that you have no pain"

The American raved in the air with his clenched fists. "You think that I'm craged" he cried "and by the eternal you are enough to make me so! When I say that I sent the bishop I mean that I saw to the Job. You remember when I stepped back to your friend the Major?"

It was the soldier's turn to grow excited now. "Well?" he cried, gripping the other's arm.

"Well, when we send a scout in the woods, if the matter is worth it we send a second one at another hour, and so one or other comes back with his hair on. That's the Iroquois fashion, and a good fashion too"

"My God! I believe that you have saved me!"

"You needn't grip onto my arm like a fish-eagle on a trout! I went back into the Major then and I asked him when he was in Paris to pass by the Archbishop's door"

"Well? Well?"

"I showed him this lump of chalk. If we've been there" said I "you'll see a great cross on the left side of the door-post. If there's no cross then pull the latch and ask the bishop if he'll come up to the palace as quick as his horses can bring him" The Major started an hour after us, he would be in Paris by half past ten, the Bishop would be in his carriage by eleven, and he would reach Versailles half an hour ago, that is to say about half past twelve. By the Lord, I think I've driven him off his head!"

It was no wonder that the young woodsman was alarmed at the effect of his own announcement. His slow and steady nature was incapable of the quick violent variations of the fiery Frenchman. De Catinat, who had thrown off his bonds before he had lain down, spun round the cell now, waving his arms and his legs, with his shadow capering up the wall behind him, all distorted in the moonlight. Finally he threw himself into his comrade's arms with a torrent of thanks and ejaculations and praises and promises patting him with his hands and hugging him to his breast

"Oh, if I could but do something for you! he exclaimed "If I could do something for you!"

"You can then. Lie down on that straw and go to sleep"

"And to think that I sneered at you! I! Oh, you have had your revenge!"

"For the Lord's sake lie down and go to sleep!" By persuasions and a little pushing he got his

delighted companion on to his couch again, and heaped the straw over him to serve as a blanket. De Catinat was wearied out by the excitements of the day, and this last great reaction seemed to have absorbed all his remaining strength. His lids drooped heavily over his eyes, his head sunk deeper into the soft straw, and his last remembrance was that the tireless American was seated cross legged in the moonlight, ~~and was~~ working furiously with his ~~long~~ knife upon one of the billets of wood.

So weary was the young guardsman that it was long past noon, and the sun was shining out of a cloudless blue sky before he awoke. For a moment, envelopped as he was in straw, and with the rude arch of the dungeon, meeting in four rough-hewn groinings above his head, he stared about him in bewilderment. Then in an instant the doings of the day before, his mission, the ambuscade, his imprisonment all flashed back to him, and he sprang to his feet. His comrade who had been dozing in the corner jumped up also at the first movement with his hand on his knife and ~~his~~ a sinister glance directed towards the door.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said he "I thought it was the man"

"Has some one been in then?"

"Yes, they brought those two loaves and a jug of water, just about dawn, when I was settling down for a rest"

"Did he say anything?"

"No. It was the little black one"

"Simon, they called him"

"The same. He laid the things down and was gone. I thought that ~~maybe~~ if he came again we might get him to stop"

"How then?"

"Maybe if we got these stirrup leathers round his ankles he would not get them off quite as easy as we have done"

"And what then?"

"Well he would tell us where we are, and what is to be done with us"

"Pshaw, what does it matter since our mission is done"

"It may not matter to you. There's no accounting for tastes. But it matters a good deal to me. I'm not used to sitting in a hole, like a bear in a trap, waiting for what other folk choose to do with me. It's new to me. I found Paris a pretty close sort of place, but it's a prairie compared to this. It don't suit a man of my habits, and I am going to come out of it."

"There's no help but patience, my friend"

"I don't know that. I'd get more help out of a bar and a few pegs." He opened his coat, and took out a short piece of rusted iron, and three small thick pieces of wood, sharpened at one end.

"Where did you get those then?"

"These are my night's work. The bar is the top one of the grate. I had a job to loosen it, but there it is. The pegs I whittled out of that log"

"And what are they for?"

"Well, you see, peg number one goes in here, where I have picked a hole between the stones. Then I've made this other log into a mallet, and with two cracks there it is firm-fixed so that you can put your weight on it. Now these two go in the same way into the holes above here. So! Now, you see, you can stand up there and look out of that

window without asking too much of your toe joint. Try it!"

De Catinat sprang up, and looked eagerly out between the bars.

"I do not know the place" said he, shaking his head "It may be any one of thirty castles which lie upon the south side of Paris, and within six or seven leagues of it. Which can it be? And who has any interest in treating us so! I would that I could see a coat of arms which might help us. Ah! There is one yonder in the centre of the mullion of the window. But I can scarce read it at the distance. I warrant that your eyes are better than mine, Amos, and that you can see what is on yonder escutcheon"

"On what?"

"On the stone slab in the centre window"

"Yes, I see it plain enough. It looks to me like three turkey-buzzards sitting on a barrel of molasses"

"Three alluvions in chief over a tower proper maybe. Those are the arms of the Provence De Hautevilles. But it cannot be that. They have no chateau within a hundred leagues. No, I cannot tell where we are"

He was dropping back to the floor, and put his weight upon the bar. To his amazement it came away in his hand.

"Look, Amos, look!" he cried

"Ah, you've found it out! Well I did that during the night"

"And how? With your knife?"

"No, I could make no way with my knife, but when I got the bar out of the grate I managed faster. I'll put this one back now so

some of these folk down below may notice that we have got it loose."

"Are they all loose"

"Only the one at present, but we'll get the other two out during the night. You can take that bar out and work with it, while I use my own picker at the other. You see the stone is soft, and by grinding it you soon make a groove along which you can slip the bar. It will be mighty queer if we can't clear a road for ourselves before morning."

"Well, but even if we could get out into the courtyard where could we turn to then?"

"One thing at a time, friend. You might as well stick at the Kennebec because you could not see how you would cross the Penobscot. Anyway there is more air in the yard than in here, and when the window is clear we shall soon plan out the rest"

The two comrades did not dare to do any work during the day for fear they should be surprised by the gaoler, or observed from without. No one came near them, but they ate their looves and drank their water with the appetite of men who had often known what it was to be without even such simple food as that. The instant that night fell they were both up upon the pegs, grinding away at the hard stone and tugging at the bars. It was a ~~bright~~ rainy dark night ~~moonlight night and~~ and there was a sharp thunder storm but they could see very well while the shadow of the arched window prevented their being seen. Before midnight they had loosened one bar, and the other was just beginning to give, when some slight noise made them turn their heads, and there was their gaoler standing open-mouthed in the middle of the cell, staring up at

them.

It was de Catinat who observed him first, and he sprang down at him in an instant with his bar. ~~but At the first~~ his movement the man ~~bound~~ rushed for the door, and drew it after him just as the American's tool whizzed past his ear and down the passage. As the door slammed the two comrades looked at each other. The Guardsman shrugged his shoulders and the other whistled.

"It is scarce worth while to go on" said de Catinat.

"We may as well be doing that as anything else. If my picker had been an inch lower I'd have had him. Well, maybe he'll get a stroke, or break his neck down those stairs. I've nothing to work with now, but a few rubs with your bar will finish the job. Ah dear! You are right and we are fairly treed!"

A great bell had begun to ring in the Chateau, and there was a loud buzz of voices and a clatter of feet upon the stones. Hoarse orders were shouted and there was the sound of turning keys. All this coming suddenly in the midst of the stillness of the night showed only too certainly that the alarm had been given. Amos Green threw himself down in the straw with his hands in his pockets, and de Catinat leaned sulkily against the wall, waiting for whatever might come to him. ~~Ten~~ Five minutes passed however, and yet another ~~ten~~ five without anyone appearing. The hubbub in the court-yard continued but there was no sound in the corridors which led to their cell.

"Well, I'll have that bar out after all" said the American at last, rising and ~~and~~ stepping

over to the window. "Anyhow we'll see what all this cater wauling is about" He climbed up on his pegs, as he spoke, and peeped out.

"Come up!" he cried excitedly to his comrade "They've got some other game going on here, and they are all a deal too busy to trouble their heads about us"

De Catinat clambered up beside him and the two stood staring down into the Court-yard. A brazier had been lit at each corner, and the place was thronged with men, many of whom carried torches. The yellow glare played fitfully over the grim grey walls, flickering up sometimes until the highest turrets shone golden against the black sky, and then, as the wind caught them, dying away until they scarce threw a glow upon the cheek of their bearer. The main gate was open, and a carriage, which had apparently just driven in, was standing at a small door immediately in front of their window. The wheels and sides were ~~gray with dust~~ brown with mud, and the two horses were reeking and heavy headed, as though their journey had been both swift and long. A man wearing a plumed hat and enveloped in a riding coat had stepped ~~out of~~ from the carriage, and then, turning round, had dragged a second person out after him. There was a scuffle, a cry, a push, and the two figures had vanished through the door. As it closed the carriage drove away, the torches and braziers were extin-quished, the main gate was closed once more, and all was as quiet as before this sudden interruption.

"Well!" gasped de Catinat "Is this another king's messenger they've got?"

"There will be lodgings for two more here in a short time" said Amos Green "If they only leave us alone this cell won't hold us long"

"I wonder where that gaoler has gone"

"He may go where he likes ~~as~~ long as he keeps away from here. Give me your bar again. This thing is giving. It won't take us long to have it out" He set to work furiously, trying to deepen the groove in the stone through which he hoped to drag the staple. Suddenly he ceased and strained his ears.

"By thunder!" said he "There's some one working on the other side"

They both stood listening. There was the thud of hammers, the rasping of a saw, and the clatter of wood from the other side of the wall.

"What can they be doing?"

"I can't think"

"Can you see them?"

"They are too near the wall"

"I think I can manage." said de Catinat "I am a slighter man than you." He pushed his head and neck and half of one shoulder through the gap between the bars, and there he remained until his friend thought that perhaps he had stuck, and pulled at his legs to extricate him. He wriithed back however without any difficulty.

"They are building something" he whispered

"Building!"

"Yes, there are four of them with a lantern."

"What can they be building then?"

"It's a shed, I think. I can see four sockets in the ground, and they are fixing four uprights into them"

"Well, we can't get away as long as there are

four men just under our window"

"Impossible!"

"But we may as well finish our work for all that"

The gentle scrapings of his ~~bar~~ iron were drowned amid the noise which swelled ever louder from without. The bar loosened at the end, and he drew it slowly towards him. At that instant however, just as he was disengaging it a round head appeared between him and the moonlight – a head with a great shock of tangled hair, and a woollen cap upon the top of it. So astonished was Amos Green at the sudden apparition that he let go his grip upon the bar which, falling outwards, toppled over the edge of the window-sill.

"You great fool!" shrieked a voice from below "Are your fingers ever to be thumbs then that you should fumble your tools so! A thousand thunders of heaven! You have broken my shoulder"

"What is it then?" cried the other "My faith, Pierre, if your fingers went as fast as your tongue, you would be the first joiner in France"

"What is it, you ape! You have dropped your tool upon me"

"I! I have dropped nothing"

"Idiot! Would you have me believe that iron falls from the sky. I say that you have struck me, you foolish clumsy fingered lout"

"I have not struck you yet" cried the other "But by the virgin if I have more of this I will come down the ladder to you"

"Silence, you good-for-noughts" said a third voice sternly. "If the work be not done by daybreak there will be a heavy reckoning for somebody"

And again the steady hammering and sawing went forward. The head still passed and repassed, its owner walking apparently upon some platform which they had constructed beneath their window, but ~~he~~ never ~~gave~~ giving a glance or a thought to the black square opening beside him. It was early morning, and the first cold light was beginning to steal over the courtyard, before the work was at last finished and the workmen had left. Then at last the prisoners dared to climb up and to see what it was which had been constructed during the night. It gave them a catch of the breath as they looked at it. It was a scaffold.

There it lay, the ill omened platform of dark greasy boards, newly fastened together, but evidently used often before for the same purpose. It was buttressed up against their wall, and extended a clear twenty feet out, with a broad wooden stair leading down from the further side. In the centre stood a headsman's block, all haggled at the top, and smeared with rust coloured stains.

"I think its time that we left" said Amos Green

"Our work is all in vain, Amos" said de Catinat sadly "Whatever our fate may be — and this looks ill enough — we can but submit to it like brave men"

"Tut, man, the window is clear. Let us make a rush for it"

"It is useless. I can see a line of armed men along the further side of the Yard"

"A line! At this hour!"

"Yes, and here come more. See at the centre gate! Now what in the name of heaven is

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this?"

As he spoke, the door which faced them had opened, and a singular procession had filed out. First came two dozen foot men, walking in pairs, all carrying halberts and clad in the same maroon-coloured liveries. After them a huge bearded man, with his tunic off, and the sleeves of his coarse shirt rolled up over his elbows, strode along with a great axe over his left shoulder. Behind him ~~walked~~ a priest with an open missal, pattering forth prayers, and ~~beneath~~ in his shadow ~~a~~ was a woman, clad in black, her neck bared, and a black shawl cast over her head and drooping in front of her bowed ~~head~~ face. ~~Close at their heels~~ Within grip of her walked a tall thin fierce faced man, ~~with~~ harsh red features, and a great jutting nose. ~~like the bill of a savage bird.~~ He wore a flat velvet cap with a single eagle feather fastened into it by a diamond clasp which gleamed in the morning light. But bright as was his gem, his dark eyes were brighter still, and ~~gleamed~~ sparkled from under his bushy brows with a mad brilliancy which bore with it something of menace and of terror. His limbs jerked as he walked, his features twisted, and he ~~bore~~ carried himself like a man who strives hard to hold himself in when his whole soul is aflame with exultation. Behind him again twelve more maroon-clad retainers brought up the rear of this singular process on.

The woman had faltered at the foot of the scaffold, but the man behind her had thrust her ~~forward~~ on with such force that she stumbled over the lower step, and would have fallen had she not clutched at the arm of the priest. At the top of the ladder her eyes met the

dreadful block, and she burst into a scream, and shrunk backwards. But again the man thrust her on, and two of the followers caught her by either wrist and dragged her forwards.

"Oh, Maurice, Maurice!" she screamed "I am not fit to die! Oh, forgive me, Maurice, as you hope for forgiveness yourself! Maurice! Maurice!" She strove to get towards him, to clutch at his wrist, at his sleeve, but he stood with his hand on his sword, gazing at her with a face which was all wreathed and contorted with merriment. At the sight of that dreadful mocking face the prayers froze upon her lips. As well pray for mercy to the dropping stone, or to the rushing stream. She turned away, and threw back the mantle which had shrouded her features.

"Ah, Sire! Sire! If you could see me now!"

And at the cry, and at the sight of that fair pale face, de Catinat, looking down from the window was stricken as though by a dagger, for there standing beside the headsman's block was she who had been the most powerful, as well as the wittiest and the fairest of the women of France, none other than Françoise de Montespan, so lately the favourite of the king.

Chap. XIX
In the King's Cabinet

On the night upon which such strange chances had befallen his messengers, the king had sat alone in his Cabinet. Over his head a perfumed lamp, held up by four little flying Cupids of Crystal who dangled by golden chains from the painted ceiling, cast a brilliant light upon the chamber, which was flashed back twenty fold by the mirrors upon the wall. The ebony and silver furniture, the dainty carpet of La Savonnierre, the silks of Tours, the tapestries of the Gobelins, the gold work and the delicate china ware of Sevres — the best of all that France could produce ~~which~~ was centred between these four walls. Nothing had ever passed through that door which was not a masterpiece of it's kind. And amid all this brilliance the master of it sat, his chin resting upon his hands, his elbows upon the table, with eyes which stared vacantly at the wall, a moody and a solemn man.

But though his dark eyes were fixed upon the wall they saw nothing of it. They looked rather down the long vista of his own life, away to those early years when what we dream and what we do shade so mistily into one another. Was it a dream or was it a fact those two men who used to stoop over his baby crib, the one with the dark coat and the star upon his breast whom he had been taught to call father, and that other one with the long red gown and the little twinkling eyes. Even now after more than forty years that wicked astute powerful face flashed up and he saw once more old Richelieu, the great unanointed king of France. And then that other Cardinal, the long lean one who had taken his pocket

money, and had grudged him his food, and had dressed him in old clothes. How well he could recall the day when Mazarin had rouged himself for the last time and how the court had danced with joy at the news that he was no more! And his mother too, how beautiful she was, and how masterful! Could he not remember how bravely she had borne herself during that war in which the power of the great nobles had been broken, and how she had at last lain down to die, imploring the priests not to stain her cap strings with their holy oils. And then he thought of what he had done himself, how he had shorn down his great subjects until, instead of being like a tree among saplings, he had been alone, far above all others, with his shadow covering the whole land. Then there were his wars, and his laws, and his treaties. Under his care France had overflowed her frontiers, both on the north and on the east, and yet had been so welded together internally that she had but one voice, with which she spoke through him. And then there was that line of beautiful faces which wavered up in front of him. There was Olympe de Mancini whose Italian eyes had first taught him that there is a power which can rule over a king. Her sister too, Marie de Mancini, his wife with her dark little sunbrowned face, Henrietta of England whose death had ~~first~~ shown him the horrors which lie in life, La Vallière, Montespan, Fontanges, some were dead, some were in convents, some who had been wicked and beautiful were now only wicked. And what had been the outcome of all this troubled striving life of his. He was already at the outer verge of his middle years, he had lost his taste for the pleasures of his youth, gout and vertigo were ever

at his foot and at his head to remind him that between them lay a kingdom which he could not hope to govern. And after all these years he had not won a single true friend, not one, in his family, in his court, in his country, save only this woman whom he was to wed that night. And she, how patient she was, how good, how lofty! With her he might hope to wipe off by the true glory of his remaining years, all the sin and the folly of the past. Would that the Archbishop might come that he might feel that she was indeed his, that he held her with hooks of steel, which should bind them as long as life should last.

There came a tap at the door. He sprang up eagerly, thinking that the ecclesiastic might have arrived. It was however only his personal attendant to say that Louvois would crave an interview. Close at his heels came the minister himself, high-nosed and heavy chinned, two great leather bags were dangling from his hand.

"Sire" said he, when Bontems had retired "I trust that I do not intrude upon you"

"No, no, Louvois. My thoughts were in truth beginning to be very indifferent company, and I am glad to be rid of them"

"Your Majesty's thoughts can never, I am sure, be anything but pleasant" said the Courtier. "But I have brought you here something which I trust may make them even more so"

"Ah! What is that?"

"When so many of our young nobles went into Germany and Hungary you were pleased in your wisdom to say that you would like well to see what reports they sent home to their friends, and

also what news was sent out from the Court to them"

"Yes"

"I have them here, all that the Courrier has brought in and all that are gathered to go out, each in its own bag. The wax has been softened in spirit, the fastenings have been steamed, and they are now open"

The king took out a handful of the letters and glanced at the addresses.

"I should indeed like to read the hearts of these people" said he "Thus only can I tell the true thoughts of those who bow and simper before my face. I suppose" with a sudden flash of suspicion from his eyes, "that you have not yourself looked into these"

"Oh, sire, I had rather die"

"You swear it?"

"As I hope for salvation"

"Hem! There is one among these which I see is from your own son"

Louvois changed colour and stammered as he looked at the envelope "Your majesty will find that he is as loyal out of your presence as in it, else he is no son of mine" said he.

"Then we shall begin with his. Ha! it is but ten lines long. 'Dearest Achille — How I long for you to come back. The court is as dull as a cloister now that you are gone. My ridiculous father still struts about like a turkey cock as if all his medals and crosses could cover the fact that he is but a head lacquey with no more real power than I have. He wheedles a good deal out of the king, but what he does with it I cannot imagine, for little comes my way. I still owe those ten thousand livres to the man in the Rue Orfèvre. Unless I have some luck at lansquenet I shall have to come out soon and join you' Hem! I

did you an injustice, Louvois. I see that you have not looked over ~~read~~ these letters"

The minister had sat with a face which was the colour of beet root and eyes which projected from his head while this epistle was being read. It was with relief that he came to the end of it, for atleast there was nothing which compromised him seriously with the king, but every nerve in his great body tingled with rage as he thought of the way in which his young scapegrace had alluded to him."

"The viper!" he cried "Oh, the foul snake in the grass! I will make him curse the day that he was born"

"Tut, tut, Louvois!" said the king "You are a man who has seen much of life, and you should be a philosopher. Hotheaded youth says ever more than it means. Think no more of the matter. But what have we here. A letter from my dearest girl to her husband the Prince of Conti. I would pick her writing out of a thousand. Oh, dear soul, she little thought that my eyes would see her ~~at~~ artless prattle. Why should I read it since I already know every thought of her innocent heart!" He unfolded the sheet ~~with~~ of pink scented paper with a fond smile upon his face, but it faded away as his eyes glanced down the page, and he sprang to his feet with a snarl of anger, his hand over his heart and his eyes still glued to the paper.

"Minx!" he cried in a choking voice "Impertinent heartless minx! Louvois, you know what I have done for the princess! You know that she has been as the apple of my eye. What have I ever grudged her? What have I ever denied her?"

"You have been goodness itself, sire" said Louvois, whose own wounds smarted less now that he

saw his master writhing.

"Hear what she says of me." Old Father Grumpy is much as usual save that he gives a little at the knees. You remember how we used to laugh at his airs and graces! Well, he has given up all that, and ~~he goes strutting~~ though he still struts about on great high heels, like a Landes peasant on his stilts, ~~with~~ he has no ~~colour~~ brightness at all in his clothes. Ofcourse all the court follow his example so you can imagine what a night mare place this is. Then this woman still keeps in favour, and her frocks are as dismal as Grumpy's coats, so when you come back we shall go into the country together, and you shall dress in red velvet, and I shall wear blue silk, and we shall have a little coloured court of our own in spite of my majestic papa"

Louis sank his face in his hands.

"You hear how she speaks of me, Louvois" he cried with a sob.

"It is infamous, sire, infamous"

"She calls me names — me, Louvois!"

"Atrocious, sire"

"And my knees! One would think that I was an old man!"

"Scandalous. But, sire, I would beg to say that it is a case in which your Majesty's philosophy may well soften your anger. Youth is ever hot headed, and says more than it means. Think no more of the matter"

"You speak like a fool, Louvois. The child that I have loved turns upon me, and you ask me to think no more of it. Ah, it is one more lesson that a king can trust least of all those who have his own blood in their veins. What writing is this? Ah, it is the good Cardinal de Bouillon. One may not have faith in one's own kin, but this sainted man loves me not only because I have

placed him where he is, but because it is his nature to look up to and to love those whom God has placed above him. I will read you his letter, Louvois, to show you that there is still such a thing as loyalty and gratitude in France."

"'My dear Prince de la Roche-sur-yon' Ah! it is to him he writes 'I promised when you left that I would let you know from time to time how things were going at the Court, as you consulted me about bringing your daughter up from Anjou, in the hope that she might catch the king's fancy' What! What, Louvois! What villainy is this!' The sultan goes from bad to worse. The Fontanges was atleast the prettiest woman in France, though between ourselves there was just a shade too much of the red in her hair — an excellent colour in a Cardinal's gown, my dear Duc, but nothing brighter than chestnut is permissable in a lady. The Montespan too was a fine woman in her day, but fancy his picking up now with a widow who is older than himself, a woman too who does not even try to make herself attractive, but kneels at her prie dieu or works at her tapestry from morning till night. They say that December and May make a bad match, but my own opinion is that two Novembers make an even worse one'. Louvois! Louvois! I can read no more! Have you a lettre-de-cachet"

"There is one here, sire"

"For the Bastille?"

"No, for Vincennes"

"That will do very well. Fill it up, Louvois! Put this villain's name in! Let him be arrested tonight and taken there in his own ~~carroche~~ calecho. The shameless ungrateful foulmouthed villain. Why did you bring me these letters, Louvois. Oh why did you yield to my foolish

whim! My God, is there no truth or honour or loyalty in the world!" He stamped his feet, and ~~terrible~~ shook his clenched hands in the air in the frenzy of his ~~grief~~ anger and disappointment.

"Shall I then put back the others?" asked Louvois eagerly. He had been on thorns since the king had begun to read them, not knowing what disclosure might come next.

"Put them back, but keep the bag"

"Both bags?"

"Ah, I had forgot the other one. Perhaps if I have hypocrites around me I have atleast some honest subjects at a distance. Let us take one haphazard. Who is this from? Ah, this from the Duc de la Rochefoucault. He has ever seemed to be a modest and dutiful young man. What has he to say? 'The Danube – Belgrade – The Grand Vizier – Ah!" He gave a cry as if he had been stabbed.

"What then, sire?" The Minister had taken a step forward, for he was frightened by the expression upon the king's face.

"Take them away, Louvois! Take them away!" he cried, pushing the pile of papers away from him "I would that I had never seen them! I will look at them no more! He gibes even at my courage, I who was in the trenches when he was in his cradle. 'This war would not suit the king' he says 'for there are battles and none of the nice little safe sieges which are so dear to him' By God, he shall pay to me with his head for that jest! Aye, Louvois, it will be a dear gibe to him. But take them away! I have seen as much as I can bear!"

The minister was thrusting them back into the bag when suddenly his eye caught the bold clear

writing of Madame de Maintenon upon one of the letters. Some demon whispered to him that here was a weapon which had been placed in his hands with which he might strike one whose very name filled him with jealousy and hatred. Had she been guilty of some indiscretion in this note, then he might even now, at this last hour, turn the king's heart against her. He was an astute man, and in an instant he had seen his chance and grasped it.

"Ha" said he "It was hardly necessary to open this one"

"Which, Louvois? Whose is it?"

The minister pushed forward the letter and Louis started as his eyes fell upon it.

"Madame's writing!" he gasped.

"Yes. It is to her nephew in Germany"

Louis took it in his hand. Then with a sudden motion he threw it down among the others, and then yet again his hand stole towards it. His face was gray and haggard, and beads of moisture had broken out upon his brow. If this too were to prove to be as the others. He was shaken to the soul at the very thought. Twice he tried to pluck it out, and twice his trembling fingers fumbled with the paper. Then he tossed it over to Louvois.

"Read it to me" said he

The minister opened the letter out and flattened it upon the table with a malicious light dancing in his eyes which might have cost him his position had the king but read it aright.

"My dear nephew' he read 'What you ask me in your last is absolutely impossible. I have never abused the king's favour so far as to ask for any profit for myself, and I should be equally sorry to solicit any advance for my relatives. No one would rejoice more

than I to see you rise to be Major in your regiment, but your valour and your loyalty must be the cause, and you must not hope to do it through any word of mine. To serve such a man as ~~Louis~~ the king is it's own reward, and I am sure that whether you remain a cornet, or rise to some higher rank you will be equally zealous in his cause. He is surrounded unhappily by many base parasites. Some of these are mere fools like Lauzun, others are knaves like the late Fouquet, and some seem to me to be both fools and knaves like Louvois, the minister of war" — here the reader choked with rage, and sat gurgling and drumming his fingers upon the table.

"Go on, Louvois, go on!" said Louis, smiling up at the ceiling.

"These are the clouds which surround the sun, my dear nephew, but the sun is, believe me, shining brightly behind them. For years I have known that noble nature as few others can know it and I can tell you that his virtues are his own, but that if ever his glory is for an instant dimmed over it is because his kindness of heart has allowed him to be swayed by those who are about him. We hope soon to see you back at Versailles, staggering under the weight of your laurels. Meanwhile accept my love and every wish for your speedy promotion, although it cannot be obtained in the way which you suggest"

"Ah!" cried the king, his love shining in his eyes "How could I for an instant doubt her! And yet I had been so shaken by the others. Françoise is as true as steel. Was it not a beautiful letter, Louvois?"

"Madame is a very clever woman" said the minister evasively

"And such a reader of hearts. Has she not seen my character aright!"

"At least she has not read mine, sire"

There was a tap at the door and Bontems peeped in.

"The Archbishop has arrived, sire"

"Very ~~good~~ well, Bontems. Ask Madame to be so good as to step this way. And order the witnesses to ~~step~~ ~~the~~ assemble in the ante room."

As the valet hastened away Louis turned to his minister.

"I wish you to be one of the witnesses, Louvois"

"To what, sire?"

"To my marriage"

The minister started. "What, sire, already!"

"Now, Louvois, within five minutes"

"Very good, sire" The unhappy courtier strove hard to assume a more festive manner, but the night had been full of vexation to him, and to be condemned to assist in making this woman the king's wife was the most bitter drop of all.

"Put these letters away, Louvois. The last one has made up for all the rest. But those rascals shall smart for it all the same. By the way there is that young nephew to whom Madame wrote. Gerard d'Aubigny is his name, is it not?"

"Yes, sire"

"Make him out a Colonel's commission and give him the next vacancy, Louvois"

"A Colonel, sire! Why, he is not yet twenty"

"I cannot recollect having asked ~~[illegible]~~ you his age, Louvois. Pray am I the chief of the army or are you? Take care, Louvois! I have warned you once before. I tell you, man, that if I choose to promote one of my Jack boots to be the head of a brigade, you shall not hesitate to make out the papers. Now go into the anteroom and wait with the other witnesses until you are wanted"

There had meanwhile been busy goings-on in the small room where the red lamp burned in front of the virgin. Françoise de Maintenon stood in the centre a little flush of excitement on her cheeks and an unwonted light in her placid gray eyes. She was clad in a dress of shining white brocade, trimmed and slashed with silver serge, and fringed at the throat and arms with costly point lace. Three women, grouped around her, rose and stooped and swayed putting a touch here, and a touch there, gathering in, looping up, and altering until all was to their taste.

"There!" said the head dressmaker, giving a final pat to a rosette of gray silk "I think that will do, your majes — that is to say, Madame"

The lady smiled at the adroit slip of the courtier dressmaker

"My tastes lean little towards dress" said she "Yet I would fain look as he would wish me to look"

"Ah, it is easy to dress Madame. Madame has a figure. Madame has a carriage. What costume would not look well with such a neck and waist and arm to set it off! But ah, Madame, what are we to do when we have to make the figure as well as the dress! There was the Princess Charlotte Elizabeth. It was but yesterday that we cut her gown. She was short, Madame, but thick, ah it is incredible how thick she was! She uses more cloth than Madame though she is too handsome and shorter. Ah, I am sure that the good God never meant people to be as thick as that. But then of course she is Bavarian and not French."

But Madame was paying little heed to the gossip of the dressmaker. Her eyes were fixed upon the statue in the corner and her lips were moving in prayer, prayer that she might be worthy of this great destiny which

had come so suddenly upon her, a poor governess, that she might walk straight among the pitfalls which surrounded her upon every side, that this night's work might bring a blessing upon France, and upon the man whom she loved. There came a discreet tap at the door to break in upon her prayer.

"It is Bontems, Madame" said Mademoiselle Nanon "He says that the king is ready"

"Then we shall not keep him waiting. Come, Mademoiselle, and may God shed his blessing upon what we are about to do."

The little party assembled in the King's antechamber and started from there to the private chapel. In front walked the portly bishop, clad in a green vestment, puffed out with the importance of the function, his missal in his hand, and his finger between the pages at the service 'de matrimonius'. Beside him strode his almoner, and two little servitors of the court in crimson cassocks bearing lighted torches. The king and Madame de Maintenon walked side by side, she quiet and composed with gentle bearing and downcast eyes, he with a flush on his dark cheeks and a nervous furtive look in his eyes, like a man who knows that he is in the midst of one of the great crises of his life. Behind them in solemn silence followed a little group of chosen witnesses, the lean silent Père La Chaise, Louvois scowling heavily at the bride, the Marquis de Montchevreuil and his wife, the Marquis de Chamarante, Bontems and Mademoiselle Nanon.

The torches shed a strong yellow light upon this small band as they advanced slowly through the corridors and salons which led to the Chapel, and they threw a garish glare upon the painted walls and ceilings, flashing back from gold work and from mirror,

but leaving long trailing shadows in the corners. The king glanced nervously at these black recesses and at the portraits of his ancestors and relations which lined the walls. As he passed that of his late queen Maria Theresa he started and gasped with horror.

"My God!" he whispered "She frowned and spat at me"

Madame laid her cool hand upon his wrist. "It is nothing, sire" she murmured in her soothing voice "It was but the light flickering over the picture"

Her words had their usual effect upon him. The startled look died away from his eyes, and, taking her hand in his he walked resolutely forwards. A minute later they were before the altar and the words were being said which should bind them for ever together. As they turned away again, her new ring blazing upon her finger, there was a buzz of congratulation around her. The king only said nothing but he looked at her and she had no wish that he should say more. She was still calm and pale but the blood throbbed in her temples. 'You are Queen of France now" it seemed to be humming 'Queen, Queen, Queen'.

But a sudden shadow had fallen across her, and a low voice was in her ear. 'Remember your promise to the church' it whispered. She started and turned to see the pale eager face of the Jesuit beside her.

"Your hand has turned cold, Francoise" said Louis "Let us go, dearest. We have been too long in this dismal church"

Chap XX.

~~Madeleine de Maintenon~~ ~~further~~-!
The two Françoises.

Madame de Montespan had retired to rest easy in her mind after receiving the message from her brother. She knew Louis as few others knew him, and she was well aware of that obstinacy in trifles which was one of his characteristics. If he had said that he would be married by the Archbishop, then the Archbishop it must be, Tonight atleast there should be no marriage. Tomorrow was a new day and if during it she could not shake the king's plans then indeed she must have lost her wit as well as her beauty.

She dressed herself with care in the morning, putting on her powder, her little touch of rouge, her one patch near the dimple of her cheek, her loose robe of violet velvet, and her casconet of pearls with all the solicitude of a warrior who is bracing on his arms for a life and death contest. No news had come to her of the great event of the previous night, allthough the Court already rang with it, for her haughtiness and her bitter tongue had left her without a friend or intimate. She rose therefore in the best of spirits with her mind set on the one question as to how best she should gain an audience with the king.

She was still in her boudoir putting the last touches to her toilet when her page announced to her that the king was waiting in her salon. Madame de Montespan could hardly belief in such good fortune. She had racked her brain all morning as to how she should win her way to him, and here he was waiting for her. With a last glance at the mirror she hastened to meet him.

He was standing with his back turned looking up at one of Snyder's paintings when she

entered, but as she closed the door he turned and took two steps towards her. She had run forward with a pretty little cry of joy, her white arms outstretched, and love shining ~~in her eyes~~ on her face, but he put out his hand, gently and yet with decision, with a gesture which checked her approach. Her hands dropped to her side, her lip trembled, and she stood looking at him with her grief and her fears all speaking loudly from her eyes. There was a look upon his features which she had never seen before, and already something was whispering at the back of her soul that today atleast his spirit was stronger than her own.

"You are angry with me again!" she cried.

He had come with every intention of beginning the interview by telling her bluntly of his marriage, but now as he looked upon her beauty and her love he felt that it would have been less brutal to strike her down at his feet. Let someone else tell her then. She would know soon enough. Besides there would be less chance then of a scene, which was a thing abhorrent to his soul. His task was in any case quite difficult enough. All this ran swiftly through his mind and she as swiftly read it off in the brown eyes which gazed at her.

"You have something you came to say, and now you have not the heart to say it. God bless the kindly heart which checks the cruel tongue!"

"No, no, Madame" said Louis "I would not be cruel. I cannot forget that my life has been brightened and my Court made brilliant during ~~past~~ all these years by your wit and your beauty. But times change, Madame, and I owe a duty to the world which overrides my own personal inclinations. For every reason I think that it is best that we should arrange in the way which we discussed the other day, and that you should withdraw

yourself from the Court"

"Withdraw, sire! For how long?"

"It must be a permanent withdrawal, Madame."

She stood with clenched hands and pale face staring at him.

"I need not say that I shall make your retirement a happy one as far as in me lies. Your allowance shall be fixed by yourself, a Palace shall be erected for you in whatever part of France you may prefer, provided that it is twenty miles from Paris. An estate also —"

"Oh, sire, how can you think that such things as these would compensate me for the loss of your love" Her heart had turned to lead within her breast. Had he spoken hotly and angrily she might have hoped to turn him as she had done before, but this gentle and yet firm bearing was new to him, and she felt that all her ~~breasts~~ arts were vain against it. His coolness enraged her and yet she strove to choke down her passion and to preserve the humble attitude which was least natural to her haughty and vehement spirit. But soon the effort became too much for her.

"Madame" said he "I have thought well over this matter and it must be as I say. There is no other way atall. Since we must part the parting had best be short and sharp. Believe me it is no pleasant matter for me either. I have ordered your brother to have his carriage at the postern at nine o'clock, for I thought that perhaps you would wish to retire after nightfall"

"To hide my shame from a laughing court! It was thoughtful of you, sire. And yet perhaps this too was a duty, since we hear so much of duties nowadays, for who was it but you —"

"I know, Madame, I know! I confess it. I have

wronged you deeply. Believe me that every atonement which is in my power shall be made. Nay, do not look so angrily at me, I beg. Let our last sight ~~and~~ of each other be one which may leave a pleasant memory behind it"

"A pleasant memory!" All the gentleness and humility had fallen from her now, and her voice had the hard ring of contempt and of anger "A pleasant memory! It may well be pleasant to you who are released from the woman whom you ruined, who can turn now in peace to another without any pale face to be seen within the salons of your court to remind you of your perfidy. But to me pining in some lonely countryhouse, spurned by my husband, despised by my family, the scorn and jest of France, far from ~~everything~~ all which gave a charm to life, far from the man for whose love I have sacrificed everything, this will be a very pleasant memory to me you may be sure"

The king's eyes had caught the angry gleam which shot from hers, and yet he strove hard to set a curb upon his temper. When such a matter had to be discussed between the proudest man and the haughtiest woman in all France one or the other must yield a point. He felt that it was for him to do so, and yet it did not come kindly to his imperious nature.

"There is nothing to be gained, madame" said he "by using words which ~~does~~ are neither seemly for your tongue or for my ears. You will do me the justice to confess that where I might command I am now entreating, and that instead of ordering you as my subject, I am ~~entreating~~ pleading you as my friend"

"Oh, you show too much consideration, sire! Our relations of twenty years or so can scarce suffice to explain such forbearance ~~for~~ from you. I should indeed be grateful that you have not set your archers of the

Guard upon me, or marched me from the Palace between a file of your musketeers. Sire, how can I thank you for this forbearance!" She curtseyed low, with her face set in a ~~bitter~~ mocking smile.

"Your words are bitter, madame"

"My heart is bitter, sire"

"Nay, Françoise, be reasonable, I implore you. We have both left our youth behind —"

"The allusion to my years comes gracefully from your lips"

"Ah, you distort my words. Then I shall say no more. You may not see me again, Madame. Is there no question which you would wish to ask me before I go?"

"Good God!" she cried "Is this a man? ~~Is it~~ Has it a heart? Are these the lips which have told me so often that he loved me! Are these the eyes which have looked so fondly into mine! Can you then thrust away a woman whose life has been yours, as you put away the St Germain palace when a more showy one was ready for you. And this is the end of all those vows, those sweet whispers, those persuasions, those promises — this!"

"Nay, Madame, this is painful to both of us"

"Pain! Where is the pain in your face! I see anger in it because I have dared to speak truth. I see joy in it because you feel that your vile task is done. But where is the pain! Ah, when I am gone all will be so easy to you will it not? You can go back then to your governess —"

"Madame!"

"Ah, yes, you cannot frighten me! What do I care for all that you can do. But I know all. Do not think that I am blind. And so you would even have married her! You, the descendant of Saint Louis, and ~~the~~ she the Scarron woman, the poor drudge whom in charity I took into my household. Ah, how your courtiers will smile,

how the little poets will scribble, how the wits will whisper! You do not hear of these things of course but they are a little painful for your friends"

"My patience can bear no more" cried the king, furiously "I leave you, Madame, and for ever"

But her fury had swept all fear and all discretion from her mind. She stepped between the door and him, her face flushed, her eyes ~~shon~~ blazing, her face thrust a little forward, one small white satin slipper tapping upon the carpet.

"You are in haste, sire! Ah, she is waiting for you, doubtless"

"Let me past, madame!"

"But it was a disappointment last night, was it not, my poor sire! Ah, and for the governess, what a blow, great heaven, what a blow! No Archbishop! No marriage! All the pretty plan gone wrong! Ah, was it not cruel!"

Louis gazed at the beautiful furious face in bewilderment, and it flashed across his mind that perhaps her grief had turned her brain. What else could ~~she~~ be the meaning of this wild talk of the Archbishop and the disappointment! It would be unworthy of him to speak harshly to one who was so afflicted. He must soothe her, and above all he must get away from her.

"You have had the keeping of a good many of my family jewels" said he "I beg that you will still retain them as a small sign of my regard"

He had hoped to please her and to calm her, but in an instant she was over at her treasure cupboard, hurling double handfuls of precious stones down at his feet. They clinked and rattled, the little pellets of red and yellow and green, rolling glinting over the floor, and rapping up against the oak panels at the

base of the walls.

" ~~[illegible]~~ " They will do for the governess of the Archbishop comes at last " she cried.

He was more convinced than ever that she had lost her wits. A thought struck him by which he might appeal to all that was softer and more gentle in her nature. He stepped swiftly to the door, pushed it a half open, and gave a whispered order. A youth with long golden hair waving down over his black velvet doublet entered the room. It was her youngest son, The Count of Toulouse.

" I thought that you would wish to bid him farewell " said Louis.

She stood staring as though unable to realise the significance of his words. Then it was borne suddenly in upon her that her children as well as her lover were to be taken from her, that this other woman should see them and speak with them, and win their love while she was far away. All that was evil and bitter in the woman flushed suddenly up in her until for the instant she was what the king had thought her. If her son was not for her then he should be for none. A jewelled knife lay among her treasures ready to her hand. She caught it up and rushed at the cowering lad. Louis screamed and sprang forward to stop her; but another had been swifter than she. A woman had darted through the open door and had caught the upraised wrist. There was a moment's struggle, two queenly figures swayed and strained, and the knife dropped between their feet. The frightened Louis caught it up, and seizing ~~the~~ his little son by the wrist he rushed from the apartment. Francoise de Montespan staggered back against the ottoman to find herself confronted by the steady eyes and set face of that other Francoise, the woman whose presence fell like a shadow at every turn of her life.

"I have saved you, madame, from doing that which you would have been the first to bewail.

"Saved me! It is you who have driven me to this!"

The fallen favourite leaned against the high back of the ottaman, her hands resting behind her upon the curve of the velvet. Her lids were half closed on her flashing eyes, and her lips just parted to show a gleam of her white teeth. Here was the true Françoise de Montespan, a feline creature crouching for a spring, very far from that humble and soft spoken Françoise who had won the king back by her gentle words. Madame de Maintenon's hand had been cut in the struggle, and the blood was dripping down from the end of her fingers, but neither woman had time to spare a thought upon that. Her firm gray eyes were fixed upon her former rival as one fixes them upon some weak and treacherous creature who may be dominated by a stronger will.

"Yes, it is you who have driven me to this — you, whom I picked up when you were hardpressed for a ~~cup~~ crust of bread, or a cup of sour wine. What had you? You had nothing — ~~Andrew~~ nothing except a name that was a laughing stock. And what did I give you? I gave you everything. You know that I gave you everything. Money, position, the entrance to the court. You had them all from me. And now you mock me!"

"Madame, I do not mock you. I pity you from the bottom of my heart"

"Pity! Ha! ha! A Mortemart is pitied by the widow Scarron. Your pity may go where your gratitude is and where your character is. We shall be troubled with it no longer then"

"Your words do not pain me"

"I can believe that you are not sensitive"

"Not when my conscience is at ease"

"Ah, it has not troubled you then?"

"Not upon this point, madame"

"My God! How terrible must those other points have been!"

"I have never had an evil thought towards you"

"Then you have done many thoughtless evil deeds"

"Doubtless, but none towards you"

"None towards me! Oh woman, woman!"

"What have I done then! The king came to my room to see the children taught. He stayed. He talked. He asked my opinion on this and that. Could I be silent? Or could I say other than what I thought"

"You turned him against me!"

"I should be proud indeed if I thought that I had turned him to virtue"

"Ah, the word comes well from your lips."

"I would that I heard it upon yours"

"And so by your own confession you stole the king's love from me, as most virtuous of widows"

"I had all gratitude and kindly thought for you. You have, as you have so often reminded me, been my bene--factress. It was not necessary for you to say it for I had never for an instant forgotten it. Yet if the king has asked me what I thought I will not deny to you that I have said that sin is sin, and that he would be a worthier man if he shook off the guilty bonds which held him"

"Or exchanged them for others"

"For those of duty"

"Pah! Your hypocrisy sickens me! If you pretend to be a nun why are you not where the nuns are? You would have the best of two worlds would you not? — have all that the court can give, and yet ape the manners of the cloister. Ah, but you need not do it with me. I know you, Madame, I know you as your inmost heart knows

you. I was honest and what I did I did before the world. You behind your priests and your directors and your pridieus and your missals, do you think that you deceive me, as you deceive others?

Her antagonist's gray eyes sparkled for the first time and she took a quick step forward with one white hand half lifted in rebuke.

"You may speak as you will of me" said she "To me it is no more than the foolish parroquet which chatters in your anteroom. But do not touch upon things which are sacred. Ah, if you would but ~~turn~~ raise your own thoughts to such things, if you would but turn them inwards and see, before it is too late, how vile and foul is this life which you have led. What might you not have done! His soul was in your hands like clay for the potter. Ah, if you had raised him up, if you had led him on the higher paths, if you had brought out all that is noble and good within him, how your name would have been loved and blessed from the chateau to the cottage. But no, you dragged him down, you wasted his youth, you drew him from his wife, you marred his manhood. A crime in one so high begets a thousand others from those who look to him for an example, and all, all are upon your soul. Take heed, Madame, for God's sake take heed ere it be too late! For all your beauty there can be for you, as for me, but a few short years of life. Then when that brown hair is white, when that white cheek is sunken, when that bright eye is dimmed, ah, then God pity the sinstained soul of Françoise de Montespan!"

Her rival had sunk her head for the moment before the solemn words and the masterful eyes. For an instant she stood silent, cowed for the first time in all her life, but then the mocking defiant spirit came back to her, and she glanced up with a curling lip.

"I am already provided with a spiritual director, thank you" said she "Ah, Madame, you must not think to throw dust in my eyes! I know you and know you well!"

"On the contrary, you seem to know less that I had expected. If you know me so well pray what am I?"

All her rivals bitterness and hatred rang in the hard tones of her answer.

"You are" said she "the governess of my children and the secret mistress of the king"

"You are mistaken" answered Madame de Maintenon serenely "I am the governess of your children and I am the king's wife"

Chap XXI

The Man in the Caléche

Often had ~~the fallen favourite~~ de Montespan feigned a faint in the days when she wished to disarm the anger of the king. So she had drawn his arms round her, and won the pity which is the twin sister of love. But now she knew what it was to have the senses struck out of her by a word. She could not doubt the truth of what she heard. There was that in her rival's face, in her steady eye, in her quiet voice which carried absolute conviction with it. She stood stunned for an instant, panting, her outstretched hands feeling at the air, her defiant eyes dulling and glazing. Then with a short sharp cry, the wail of one who has fought hard and yet knows that she can fight no more, her proud head drooped, and she fell forwards senseless at the feet of her rival.

Madame de Maintenon stooped and raised her up in her strong white arms. There was true grief and pity in her ~~face~~ eyes as she looked down at the snow-pale face which lay against her bosom, all the bitterness and pride gone out of it, and nothing left save the tear which sparkled under the dark lashes, and the petulant droop of the lip, like that of a child which has wept itself to sleep. She laid her on the ottoman and placed a silken cushion under her head. Then she gathered together and put back into the open cupboard all the jewels which were scattered about the carpet. Having locked it, and placed the key on a table where it's owner's eye would readily fall upon it, she struck a gong which summoned the little black page.

"Your mistress is indisposed" said she "Go and bring her maids to her!" And so, having done all that lay with her to do she turned away from the

great silent room where, amid the velvets and the gilding her beautiful rival lay like a crushed flower, helpless and hopeless.

Helpless enough for what could she do, and hopeless too for how could ~~the future~~ fortune aid her! The instant that her senses had come back to her she had sent away her waiting women, and lay with clenched hands and a drawn face planning out her own weary future. She must go – that was certain. Not merely because it was the king's order, but because only misery and mockery remained for her now in the palace where she had reigned supreme. It was true that she had held her position against the queen before, but all her hatred could not blind her to the fact that her rival was a very different woman to poor meek little Maria Theresa. No, her spirit was broken at last. She must accept defeat and she must go.

She rose from the couch, feeling that she had aged ten years in an hour. There was much to be done and little time in which to do it. She had cast down her jewels when the king had spoken as though they would atone for the loss of his love, but now that the love was ~~lost~~ gone there was no reason why the jewels should be lost too. If she had ceased to be the most powerful, she might still be the richest woman in France. There was her pension of course. That would be a munificent one, for Louis was always generous. And then there was all the spoil which she had collected during these long years, the jewels, the pearls, the gold, the vases, the pictures, the crucifixes, the watches, the trinkets, together they represented many millions of livres. With her own hands she packed away the more precious and portable of them, while she arranged with her brother for the safe keeping of the others. All day she was at work in a mood of

feverish energy, doing anything and everything which might distract her thoughts from her own defeat and her rivals victory. By evening all was ready, and she had arranged that her property should be sent after her to Petit Bourg, to which castle she intended to retire.

It wanted half an hour of the time fixed for her departure when a young cavalier whose face was strange to her was ushered into her room. He came with a message from her brother.

"Monsieur de Vivonne regrets, Madame, that the rumour of your departure has got abroad among the Court"

"What do I care for that, Monsieur" she retorted with all her old spirit.

"He says, Madame, that the Courtiers may assemble at the west gate to see you go – that Madame de Neuilly will be there, and the Duchesse de Chambord and Mademoiselle de Rohan and –"

The lady shrunk with horror at the thought of such an ordeal. To drive away from the palace where she had been more than queen, under the scornful eyes and bitter jibes of so many personal enemies! After all the humiliations of the day that would be the crowning cup of sorrow. Her nerve was broken. She could not face it"

"Tell my brother, monsieur, that I should be much obliged if he would make fresh arrangements by which my departure might be private"

"He bade me say that he had done so, Madame"

"Ah, at what hour then?"

"Now. As soon as possible"

"I am ready. At the west gate then?"

"No, at the east. The carriage waits"

"And where is my brother?"

"We are to pick him up at the park gate"

"And why that?"

"Because he is watched, and were he seen beside the carriage all would be known"

"Very good. Then, Monsieur, if you will take my cloak and this casket we may start at once"

They made their way by a circuitous route through the less used corridors she hurrying on, like a guilty creature, a hood drawn over her face, and her heart in a flutter at every stray footfall. But fortune stood ~~their~~ her friend. She met no one, and soon found herself at the Eastern postern gate. A couple of phlegmatic Swiss guardsmen leaned upon their muskets upon either side, and the lamp above shone upon the carriage which awaited her. The door was open and a tall Cavalier swathed in a black cloak handed her into it. He then took the seat opposite to her, slammed the door, and the carlóche rattled away down the main drive.

It had not surprised her that this man should join her inside the coach, for it was usual ~~enough~~ to have a guard there, and he was doubtless taking the place which her brother would afterwards occupy. That was all natural enough. But when ten minutes passed by and she had neither moved nor spoken, she peered at him through the gloom with some curiosity. In the glance which she had of him as he handed her in she had seen that he was dressed like a gentleman, and there was that in his bow and wave as he did it which told her experienced senses that he was a man of courtly manners. But

courtiers ~~a~~, as she had known them, were gallant and garrulous, and this man was so very quiet and still. Again she strained her eyes through the gloom. His hat was ~~drawn~~ pulled down and his cloak was still drawn across his mouth, but from out of the shadow she seemed to get a glimpse of two eyes which peered at her even as she did at him.

Alas! the silence impressed her with a vague uneasiness. It was time to bring it to an end.

"Surely, monsieur, we have passed the park gate where we were to pick up my brother"

Her companion neither answered nor moved. She thought that perhaps the rumble of the heavy calèche had drowned her voice.

"I say, monsieur," she repeated, leaning forwards, "that we have passed the place where we were to meet Monsieur de Vivonne."

He took no notice.

"Monsieur" she cried "I again remark that we have passed the gates"

There was no answer.

A thrill ran through her nerves. Who or what could he be, this silent man? Then suddenly it struck her that he might be dumb.

"Perhaps Monsieur is afflicted" she said "Perhaps Monsieur cannot speak. If that be the cause of your silence will you raise your hand and I shall understand"

He sat rigid and silent.

Then a sudden mad fear came upon her, shut up in the dark with this dreadful voiceless thing. She screamed in her terror and strove to pull down the window and opened the door. But a grip of steel closed suddenly round her wrist and forced her back

into her seat. And yet the man's body had not moved, and there was no sound save the lurching and rasping of the carriage and the clatter of the flying horses. They were already out on the country roads far beyond Versailles. It was darker than before, heavy clouds had banked over the ~~horizon~~ heavens, and the rumbling of thunder was heard low down on the horizon.

The lady lay back panting upon the leather cushions of the carriage. She was a brave woman, and yet this sudden strange horror coming on her at the moment when she was weakest had shaken her to the soul. She crouched in the corner staring across with eyes which were dilated with terror at the figure on the other side. If he would but say something. Any revelation, any menace was better than this silence. It was so dark now that ~~[illegible]~~ she could hardly see ~~the~~ his vague outline, and every instant as the storm gathered it became still darker. The wind was blowing in little short angry puffs, and still there was that far off rattle and rumble. Again the strain of the silence was unbearable. She must break it at any cost.

"Sir" said she "There is some mistake here. I do not know by what right you prevent me from pulling down the window and giving my directions to the coachman"

He said nothing.

"I repeat, sir, that there is some mistake. This is the carriage of my brother, Monsieur de Verrine, and he is not a man who will allow his sister to be treated uncourteously"

A few heavy drops of rain splashed against one window. The clouds were lower and denser. She had quite lost sight ~~now~~ of that motionless figure, but it was all the more terrible to her now that it

was unseen. She screamed with sheer terror but her scream availed no more than her words.

"Sir" she cried, clutching forward with her hands and grasping his sleeve "You frighten me. You terrify me. I have never harmed you. Why should you wish to ~~harm~~ hurt an unfortunate woman. Oh, speak to me, for God's sake, speak!"

Still the patter of rain upon the window, and no other sound save her own sharp breathing.

"Perhaps you do not know who I am" she continued, endeavouring to assume her usual tone of command, and talking now to an absolute and impenetrable darkness "You may learn when it is too late that you have chosen the wrong person for this pleasantry. I am the Marquise de Montespan and I am not one who forgets a slight. If you know anything of the court you must know that my word has some weight with the king. You may carry me away in this carriage, but I am not a person who can disappear without speedy enquiry, and speedy vengeance if I have been wronged. If you would — Oh Jesus! Have mercy!"

A livid flash of lightening had burst from the heart of the cloud, and, for an instant, the whole country side and the interior of the calèche was as light as day. ~~Within the coach~~ The man's face was within a handsbreath of her own his mouth wide open, his eyes mere shining slits, convulsed with silent merriment. Every detail flashed out clear in that vivid light, his red quivering tongue, the lighter pink beneath it, the broad white teeth, the short brown beard cut into a peak and bristling forward. But it was not the sudden flash, it was not the laughing cruel face which shot an icecold shudder through Françoise de Montespan. It was that of all men upon this earth this was he whom she most dreaded,

and whom she had least thought to see. ~~[illegible]~~

"Maurice!" she screamed "Maurice! It is you!"

"Yes, little wife, it is I. We are restored to each others arms you see after this ~~little~~ interval"

"Oh, Maurice, how you have frightened me! How could you be so cruel! Why would you not speak to me?"

"Because it was so sweet to sit in silence and to think that I really had you to myself after all these years with none to come between. Ah, little wife, I have often longed for this hour"

"I have wronged you, Maurice, I have wronged you! Forgive me!"

"We do not forgive in our family, my darling Françoise. Ah, is it not like old days to find ourselves driving together! And in this carriage too. It is the very one which bore us back from the Cathedral where you made your vows so prettily. I sat as I sit now, and you sat there, and I took your hand like this and I pressed it and —

"Oh, villain, you have twisted my wrist! You have broken my arm!"

"Oh, surely not, my little wife! And then you remember that as you told me how truly you would love me, I leaned forward to your lips, and —"

"Oh, help! Brute, you have cut my mouth! You have struck me with your ring"

"Struck you! Now who would have thought that spring day when we planned out our futures, that this also was in the future waiting for me and you. And this! And this!"

He struck savagely at her face in the darkness. She threw herself down, her head pressed against the cushions. With the strength and fury of a maniac he

showered his blows above her, thudding upon the leather or crashing upon the wood work, heedless of his own splintered hands.

"So I have silenced you" said he at last "I have stopped your words with my kisses before now. But the world goes on, Francoise, and times change, and women grow false and men grow stern"

"You may kill me, if you will" she moaned

"I will" said he simply.

Still the carriage flew along, Jolting and staggering in the deeply rutted country roads. The storm had passed but the growl of the thunder and the far off glint of a lightening flash was to be heard and seen on the other side of the heavens. The moon shone out with it's clear cold light, silvering the broad hedgeless poplar fringed plains, and shining through the window of the carriage upon the crouching ~~woman~~ figure, and her terrible companion. He leaned back now, his arms folded upon his chest, his eyes gloating upon the abject misery of this woman who had wronged him.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked at last

"To Portiac, my little wife"

"And why there? What would you do to me?"

"I would silence that little lying tongue for ever. It shall deceive no more men"

"You would murder me!"

"If you call it that"

"You have a stone for a heart"

"It is true. My other was given to a woman"

"Oh, my sins are indeed punished"

"Rest assured that they will be"

"Can I do nothing to atone?"

"I will see that you atone"

"You have a sword by your side, Maurice.

Why do you not kill me then if you are so bitter against me? Why do you not pass it through my heart?"

"Rest assured that I would have done so had I not an excellent reason"

"Why then?"

"I will tell you. At Portillac I have the right of the high Justice, the middle, and the low. I am seigneur there and can try, condemn and execute. It is my lawful privilege. This pitiful king will not even know how to avenge you, for the right is mine, and he cannot gainsay it without making an enemy of every seigneur in France"

He opened his mouth again and laughed at his own device, while she, shivering in every limb, turned away from his cruel face and glowing eyes, and burying her head in her hands once more she prayed God to forgive her for her poor sinful life. So they whirled through the night, behind the clattering horses, the husband and the wife, saying nothing, but with hatred and fear raging in their hearts, until a brazier fire shone down upon them from the angle of a keep, and the shadow of the huge pile loomed vaguely up in front of them in the darkness. It was the Castle of Portillac.

Chap XXII

The Scaffold of Pontillac

And thus it was that Amory de Catinat and Amos Green saw from their dungeon window the midnight carriage which discharged it's prisoner before their eyes. Hence too came that ominous ~~beat~~ planking and that strange procession in the early morning. And thus also it happened that they found themselves looking down upon Françoise de Montespan as she was led to ~~the~~ her death block, and that they heard that last piteous cry for aid at the instant when the heavy hand of the ruffian with the axe fell upon her shoulder, and she was forced down upon her knees beside the block. She shrank screaming from the dreadful redstained greasy billet of wood, but the butcher heaved up his weapon, and the Seigneur had taken a step forward with hand outstretched to seize the long auburn hair and to drag the dainty head down with it, when suddenly he was struck motionless with astonishment, and stood with his foot advanced and his hand still out, his mouth half open and his eyes fixed in front of him.

And indeed what he had seen was enough to fill any man with amazement. Out of the small square window which faced him a man had suddenly shot head foremost, pitching on to his outstretched hands and then bounding to his feet. Within a foot of his heels came the head of a second one, who fell more heavily than the first, and yet recovered himself as quickly. The one wore the blue coat and silver facings of the king's guard, the second had the dark coat and clean shaven face of a man of peace, but each ~~had~~ carried a short rusty iron bar in his hand. Not a word did either of them say, but the soldier took two quick steps forward

and struck at the headsman while he was still poising himself for a blow at the victim. There was a thud with a crackle like a breaking egg and the bar flew into pieces. The headsman gave a dreadful cry, dropped his axe, clapped his two hands to his head, and running zig zag across the scaffold fell over, a dead man, into the courtyard beneath. Quick as a flash de Catinat had caught up the axe, and faced de Montespan with the heavy weapon slung over his shoulder and a challenge in his eyes

"Now!" said he.

The Seigneur had for the instant been too astounded to speak. Now he understood at least that these strangers had come between him and his prey.

"Seize these men!" he shrieked, turning to his followers

"One moment!" cried de Catinat with a voice and manner which commanded attention "You see by my coat what I am. I am the body servant of the king. Who touches me touches him. Have a care to yourselves! It is a dangerous game"

"On, you cowards!" roared de Montespan

But the men-at-arms hesitated, for the fear of the king was as a great shadow which hung over all France. De Catinat saw their indecision and he followed up his advantage.

"This woman" he cried "is the king's own favourite, and if any harm come to a lock of her hair I tell you that there is not a living soul within this fortalice who will not die a death of torture. Fools, will you gasp out your lives upon the rack, or writhe in boiling oil at the bidding of this madman"

"Who are these men, Moreau?" cried the Seigneur furiously.

"They are prisoners, your excellency"

"Prisoners. Whose prisoners?"

"Yours, your excellency"

"Who ordered you to detain them?"

"You did. The escort brought your signet ring"

"I never saw the men. There is devilry in this. But they shall not beard me in my own castle, nor stand between me and my own wife! No, by God, they shall not and live! You men, Marceau, Etienne, Gilbert, Jean, Pierre – all you who have eaten my bread, on to them, I say!"

He glanced round with furious eyes, but they fell only upon hung heads and averted faces. With a hideous curse he flashed out his sword and rushed at his wife who still knelt half insensible beside the block. De Catinat sprang between them to protect her, but Marceau the bearded seneschal had already seized his master round the waist. With the strength of a maniac, his teeth clenched and the foam churning from the corners of his lips de Montespan writhed round in the man's grasp, and shortening his sword he thrust it through the brown beard, and deep into the throat behind it. Marceau fell back with a choking cry, the blood bubbling from his mouth and his wound, but before his murderer could disengage his weapon, de Catinat and the American aided by a dozen of the retainers had dragged him down onto the scaffold and ~~had~~ Amos Green had pinioned him so securely that he could but move his eyes and his lips, with which he lay glaring and spitting at them. So savage were his own followers against him, for Marceau was well loved amongst them, that, with axe and block so ready ~~the~~ Justice might very swiftly have had her way, had not a long clear bugle call, rising

and falling in a thousand little twirls and flourishes clanged out suddenly in the still morning air. De Catinat pricked up his ears at the sound of it like a hound at the huntsman's call.

"Did you hear, Amos?"

"It was a trumpet"

"It was the Guard's bugle call. You, there, hasten to the gate! Throw up the portcullis and drop the draw bridge! Stir yourselves, or even now you may suffer for your master's sins! It has been a narrow escape, Amos"

"You may say so, friend. I saw him put out his hand to her hair, even as you sprang from the window. Another instant and he would have had her scalped. But she is a fine woman, the fairest that ever my eyes rested upon, and it is not fit that she should kneel here upon these boards." He dragged her husband's long black cloak from him, and made a pillow for the senseless woman, with a tenderness and delicacy which came strangely from a man of his build and bearing.

He was still stooping over her when there came the clang of the falling bridge, and an instant later the clatter of the hoofs of a troop of cavalry who swept with wave of plumes, toss of manes, and jangle of steel into the Courtyard. At the head was a tall horseman in the full dress of the Guards with a curling feather in his hat, high buff gloves, and his sword gleaming in the sunlight. He cantered forward towards the scaffold, his keen dark eyes, taking in every detail of the group which awaited him there. De Catinat's face lightened at the sight of him, and he was down in an instant beside his stirrup.

"De Brissac!" he cried

"De Catinat! Now where in the name of wonder did you come from?"

"I have been a prisoner. Tell me, de Brissac, did you leave the message in Paris?"

"Certainly, I did"

"And the Archbishop came?"

"He did"

"And the marriage?"

"Took place, as arranged. That is why this poor woman, whom I see yonder, has had to leave the palace"

"I thought as much"

"I trust that no harm has come to her?"

"My friend and I were just in time to save her. Her husband lies there. He is a fiend, de Brissac!"

"Very likely, but an angel might have grown bitter had he had the same treatment."

"We have him pinioned here. He has slain a man, and I have slain another"

"On my word you have been busy"

"How did you know that we were here?"

"Nay, that is an unexpected pleasure"

"You did not come for us then?"

"No, we came for the lady"

"And how did this fellow get hold of her?"

"Her brother was to have taken her in his carriage. Her husband learned it, and, by a lying message he coaxed her into his own which was at another door. When de Vivonne found that she did not come and that her rooms were empty he made inquiries and soon learned how she had gone. De Montespan's arms had been seen on the panel, and so the king sent me here with my troop as fast as we

could gallop."

"Ah, and you would have come too late had a strange chance not brought us here. I know not who it was who waylayed us, for this man seemed to know nothing of the matter. However all that will be clearer afterwards. What is to be done now?"

"I have my own orders. Madame is to be sent to Petit Bourg, and any who are concerned in offering her violence are to be kept until the king's pleasure is known. The Castle too must be held for the king. But you, de Catinat, you have nothing to do now"

"Nothing, save that I would like well to ride into Paris to see that all is right with my Uncle and his daughter"

"Ah, that sweet little cousin of thine. By my soul I do not wonder that the folk know you well in the Rue St Martin. Well, I have carried a message for you once, and you shall do as much for me now"

"With all my heart. And whither?"

"To Versailles. The king will be on fire to know how we have fared. You have the best right to tell him since without you and your friend yonder it would have been but a sorry tale"

"I will be there in two hours"

"Have you horses?"

"Ours were slain"

"You will find some in the stables here. Pick the best since you have lost your own in the king's service"

The advice was too good to be over-looked. De Catinat, beckoning to Amos Green, hurried away with him to the stables, while de Brissac with

a few short sharp orders disarmed the retainers, stationed his guardsmen all over the Castle, and arranged for the removal of the lady and for the custody of her husband. An hour later the two friends were riding swiftly down the country road, inhaling the sweet ~~country~~ air which seemed the fresher for their late experience of the dank foul vapours of their dungeon. Far behind them a little dark pinnacle jutting out over a grove of trees marked the chateau which they had left, while on the extreme horizon to the west there came a quick shimmer and sparkle where the level rays of the early sun gleamed upon the magnificent palace which was their goal.

XXIII

The Fall of the Cévennes

Two days after Madame de Maintenon's marriage to the king there was held within the humble walls of her little room a meeting which was destined to cause untold misery to many hundreds of thou-sands of people, and yet, in the wisdom of Providence to be an instrument in carrying French arts and French ingenuity and French sprightliness among those heavier Teutonic peoples who have been the stronger and the better ever since for the leaven which they then received. For in history great evils have sometimes arisen from a virtue, and most beneficent results have often followed hard upon a crime.

The time had come when the Church was to claim her promise from Madame, and her pale cheek and sad eyes showed how vain it had been for her to try and drown the pleadings of her tender heart by the arguments of the bigots around her. She knew the Huguenots of France. Who could know them better seeing that she was herself from their stock and had been brought up in their faith. She knew their patience, their nobility, their independance, their tenacity. What chance was there that they would conform to the king's wish! A few great nobles might, but the others would laugh at the galleys, the gaol, or even the gallows, when the creed of their fathers was at stake. If their creed were no longer tolerated then, and if they remained true to it, they must either fly from the country, or spend a living death tugging at an oar or working in a chain gang upon the roads. It was a dreadful alternative to present to a

people who were so numerous that they made a small nation in themselves. And most dreadful of all that she who was of their own blood should cast her voice against them. And yet her promise had been given and now the time had come when it must be redeemed.

The eloquent Bishop Bossuet was there, with Louvois the minister of war, and the ~~thin pale~~ Jesuit, Father Lachaise, each piling argument upon argument to overcome the reluctance of the king. Beside them stood another priest, so thin and so pale that he might have risen from his bed of death, but with a fierce light burning in his large dark eyes and with a terrible resolution in his drawn brows, and in the set of his grim lanky jaw. Madame bent over her tapestry and weaved her coloured silks in silence while the king leaned upon his hand and listened with the face of a man who knows that he is driven, and yet can hardly turn against the goads. On the low table lay a paper with pen and ink beside it. It was the order for the revocation, and it only needed the king's signature to make it the law of the land.

"And so, father, you are of opinion that if I stamp out heresy in this fashion I shall assure my own salvation in the next world?" he asked

"You will have merited a reward"

"And you think so too, Monsieur Bishop?"

"Assuredly, sire"

"And you, Abbé du Chayla?"

The emaciated priest spoke for the first time, a tinge of colour creeping into his corpse like cheeks, and a more lurid glow in his deepset eyes.

"I know not about ~~sw~~ assuring your salvation, sire. I think it would take very much more to do that. But there cannot be a doubt as to

your damnation if you do not do it"

The king started angrily, and frowned at the speaker

"Your words are somewhat more curt than I am accustomed to" he remarked.

"In such a matter it were cruel indeed to leave you in doubt. I say again that your soul's fate hangs upon the balance. Heresy is a mortal sin. Thousands of heretics would turn to the church if you did but give the word. Therefore these thousands of mortal sins are all upon your soul. What hope for it then, if you do not amend."

"My father and my grandfather tolerated them"

"Then without some special extension of the grace of God your father and your grandfather are burning in hell"

"Insolent!" The king sprang from his seat.

"Sire, I will say what I hold to be the truth were you fifty times a king. What care I for any man when I know that I speak for the king of kings. See, are these the limbs of one who would shrink from testifying to truth?" With a sudden movement he threw back the long sleeves of his gown and shot out his white fleshless arms. The bones were all knotted and bent and screwed into the most fantastic shapes. Even Louvois the hardened man of the court and La Chaise the sombre priest shuddered at the sight of those dreadful limbs. He raised them above his head and turned his burning eyes upwards.

"Heaven has chosen me to testify for the faith before now" said he "I heard that blood was wanted to nourish the young church of Siam, and so to

Siam I journeyed. They tore me open, they crucified me, they wrenched and split my bones. I was left as a dead man, yet God has breathed the breath of life back into me that I may help in this great work of the regeneration of France"

"Your sufferings, father" said Louis, resuming his seat, "give you every claim, both upon the church and upon me, who am it's special champion and protector. What would you counsel then, father, in the case of those Huguenots who refuse to change"

"They should change" cried Du Chayla, with a drawn smile upon his ghastly face "They must bend or they must break. What matter if they be ground to powder if we can but build up a complete church in the land" His deepset eyes glowed with ferocity, and he shook one bony hand in savage wrath above his head.

"The cruelty with which you have been used then has not taught you to be ~~less~~ more tender to others"

"Tender! To heretics! No, sire, my own pains have taught me that the world and the flesh are as nothing and that the truest charity to another is to capture his soul at all risks to his vile body. I should have these Huguenot souls, sire, though I turned France into a shambles to gain them"

Louis was evidently deeply impressed by the fearless words and the wild earnestness of the speaker. He leaned his head upon his hand for a little time, and remained sunk in the deepest thought.

"Besides, sire" said Father La Chaise softly "There would be little need for these stronger measures of which the good Abbé speaks. As I have

already remarked to you, you are so beloved in your kingdom that the mere assurance that you had expressed your will upon the subject would be enough to turn them all to the true faith."

"I wish that I could think so, Father, I wish that I could think so. But what is this?"

It was his Valet who had half opened the door.

"Captain de Caterat is here who desires to see you at once, sire."

"Ask the Captain to enter. "Ah!" a happy thought seemed to have struck him "We shall see what love for me will do in such a matter, for if it is anywhere to be found it must be among my own body-servants."

The Guardsman had arrived that instant from his long ride, and, leaving Amos Green with the horses he had come on atonce, all dusty and travel stained to carry his message to the king. He entered now, and stood with the quiet ease of a man who is used to such scenes, his hand raised in a salute.

"What news, Captain?" asked Louis

"Major de Brissac bade me tell you, sire, that he held the Castle of Portillac, that the lady is safe, and that her husband is a prisoner"

Louis and his wife exchanged a quick glance of relief.

"That is well" said he "By the way, Captain, you have served me in many ways of late, and always with success. I hear, Louvois, that De La Salle is dead of the small pox"

"He died yesterday, sire"

"Then I desire that you make out the vacant commission of Major to Monsieur de Caterat.

Let me be the first to congratulate you, Major, upon your promotion, though you will need to exchange the blue coat for the pearl and gray of the Mousquetaires. We cannot spare you from the household, you see"

De Catinat kissed the hand which the monarch held out to him.

"May I be worthy of your kindness, sire"

"You would do what you could to serve me, would you not?"

"My life is yours, sire"

"Very good. Then I shall put your fidelity to the proof"

"I am ready for any proof"

"It is not a very severe one. You see this paper upon the table. It is an order that all the huguenots in my dominions shall give up their errors under pain of banishment and captivity. Now I have hopes that there are many of my faithful subjects who are ~~[illegible]~~ at fault in this matter, but who will abjure it when they learn that it is my clearly expressed wish that they should do so. It would be a great joy to me to find that it was so, for it would be a pain ~~to me~~ to use force against any man who bears the name of Frenchman. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sire" The young man had turned deadly pale, and he shifted his feet, and opened and clasped his hands. He had faced death a dozen times and under many different forms but never had he felt such a sinking of the heart as came over him now.

"You are yourself a huguenot, I understand. I would gladly have you then as the first fruits of this great measure. Let us hear from your own lips that you, for one, are ready to follow the lead of your king in this as in other things"

The young guardsman still hesitated, though his doubts were rather as to how he should frame his reply than as to what it's substance should be. He felt that in an instant fortune had wiped out all the good turns which she had done him during his past life and that now far from being in her debt he held a heavy score against her. The king arched his eyebrows and drummed his fingers impatiently as he glanced at the downcast face and dejected bearing.

"Why all this thought!" he cried "You are a man whom I have raised and whom I will raise. He who has a Major's epaulette at thirty may carry a Marshall's baton at fifty. Your past is mine and your future shall be no less so. What other hopes have you?"

"I have none, sire, outside your service"

"Why this silence then? Why do you not give the assurance which I demand?"

"I cannot do it, sire"

"You cannot do it"

"It is impossible. I should have no more peace in my mind or respect for myself if I knew that for the sake of position or wealth I had given up the faith of my fathers"

"Man, you are surely mad! There is all that a man could covet upon one side, and what is there upon the other?"

"There is my honour"

"And is it then a dishonour to embrace my religion"

"It would be a dishonour to me to embrace it for the sake of gain without believing in it"

"Then believe it"

"Alas, sire, a man cannot force himself to believe. Belief is a thing which must come to him, not he to it.

"On my word, father" said Louis, glancing with a bitter smile at his Jesuit confessor "I shall have to pick the cadets of the household from your seminary, since my officers have turned casuists and theologians. So for the last time you refuse to obey my request"

"Oh, sire —" De Caliniat took a step forward with outstretched hands and tears in his eyes, but the king checked him with a gesture.

"I desire no protestations" said he "I judge a man by his acts. Do you abjure or not?"

"I cannot, sire"

"You see," said Louis, turning again to the Jesuit "it will not be as easy as you think"

"This man is obstinate, it is true, but many others will be more yielding"

The king shook his head. "I would that I knew what to do" said he "Madame, I know that you at least will ever give me the best advice. You have heard all that has been said. What do you recommend"

She kept her eyes still fixed upon her tapestry, but her voice was firm and clear as she answered.

"You have yourself said that you are the eldest son of the Church" ~~said~~ she "If the eldest son desert her then who will do her bidding? And there is truth too in what the holy Abbé has said. You may imperil your own soul by condoning this sin of heresy. It grows and flourishes, and if it be not rooted out now it may choke the truth as weeds and briars choke the wheat"

"~~This God's truth, sire" said Bossuet~~ said Bossuet "There are districts in France now where a church is

not to be seen in a day's Journey, and where all the folk from the nobles to the peasants are of the same accursed faith. So it is in the Cevennes where the people are as fierce and rugged as their own mountains. Heaven guard the priests who have to bring them back from their errors"

"Whom should I send on so perilous a task?" asked Louis

The Abbé du Chayla was down in an instant upon his knees with his gaunt hands outstretched. "Me, sire! Me!" he cried "I have never asked a favour of you and never will again. But I am the man who could break these people. Send me ~~together~~ with your message to the people of the Cevennes!"

"God help the people of the Cevennes!" muttered Louis, as he looked with mingled respect and loathing at the emaciated face and fiery eyes of the fanatic "Very well, Abbé," he added aloud "You shall go to the Cevennes"

Perhaps for an instant there came upon the stern priest some premonition of that dreadful morning when as he crouched in a corner of his burning home, fifty daggers were to rasp against each other in his body. He sunk his face in his hands, and a shudder passed over his gaunt frame. Then he rose and folding his arms he resumed his impassive attitude. Louis took up the pen from the table and drew the paper towards him.

"I have the same counsel then from all of you" said he "From you, Bishop, from you, father, from you, Madame, from you, Abbé, and from you, Louvois. Well, if ill come from it may it not be visited upon me. But what is this?"

De Catinat had taken a step forward with his hand outstretched. His ardent impetuous nature had suddenly broken down all the barriers of caution and he seemed for the instant to see that countless throng of men women and children of his own faith, all unable to say a word for themselves, and all looking to him as their champion and spokesman. He had thought little of such matters when all was well, but now when danger threatened the deeper side of his nature was moved and he felt how light a thing is life and fortune when weighed against a great abiding cause and principle.

"Do not sign it, sire!" he cried "You will live to wish that your hand had withered ere it grasped that pen. I know it, sire, I am sure of it. Consider all these helpless folk, the little children, the young girls, the old and the feeble. Their creed is them--selves. As well ask the leaves to change the twigs on which they grow. They could not change. At most you could but hope to ~~drive~~ turn them from honest folk into hypocrites. And why should you do it? They honour you. They love you. They harm none. They are proud to serve in your armies, to fight for you, to work for you, to build up the greatness of your kingdom. I implore you, sire, to think again before you sign an order which will bring misery and desolation to so many!"

For a moment the king had hesitated as he listened to the short abrupt sentences in which the soldier pleaded for his fellows, but his face hardened again as he remembered how even his own personal entreaty had been unable to prevail with this young dandy of the court.

"France's religion should be that of France's king" said he "and if my own guardsmen thwart me in such a matter I must find others who will be more

faithful. That Major's commission in the Mousquetaires must go to Captain de Belmont, Sovvois"

"Very good, sire"

"And Captain de Catinat's commission may be transferred to Lieutenant Labadoyère"

"Very good, sire"

"And I am to serve you no longer!"

"You are too dainty for my service"

De Catinat's arms fell listlessly to his side, and his head sunk forward upon his breast. Then as he realised the ruin of all the hopes of his life, and the cruel injustice with which he had been treated he broke into a cry of despair and rushed from the room with the hot tears of impotent anger running down his face. So, sobbing, gesticulating, with coat unbuttoned and hat awry he burst into the stable where placid Amos Green was smoking his pipe and watching with critical eyes the grooming of the horses.

"What in thunder is the matter now?" he asked, holding his pipe by the bowl while the blue wreaths curled up from his lips

"This sword!" cried the Frenchman "I have no right to wear it. I shall break it"

"Well, and I'll break my knife too if it would hearten you up"

"And these" cried de Catinat, tugging at his silver shoulder-straps "They must go"

"Ah, you draw ahead of me there for I never had any. But come, friend, let me know the trouble that I may see if it may not be mended"

"To Paris! To Paris!" shouted the Guardsman frantically "If I am ruined I may yet be in time to save them. The horses, quick!"

It was clear to the American that some

sudden calamity had befallen, so he aided his comrade ~~to~~ and the grooms to saddle and bridle. ~~[illegible]~~. Five minutes later they were flying upon their way, and in little more than an hour their steeds, all reeking and foam flecked were pulled up outside the high house in the Rue St Martin. De Catinat sprang from his saddle and rushed upstairs while Amos followed in his own leisurely fashion.

The old Huguenot and his beautiful daughter were seated at one side of the great fireplace, her hand in his, and they sprang up together, she to throw herself with a glad cry into the arms of her lover and he to grasp the hand which his nephew held out to him. At the other side of the fireplace with a very long pipe in his mouth and a cup of wine upon a settle beside him sat a strange looking man with grizzled hair and beard, a fleshy red projecting nose, and two little grey eyes which twinkled out from under huge brindled brows. His long thin face was laced and seamed with wrinkles, crossing and recrossing every where, but fanning out in hundreds from the corners of his ~~[illegible]~~ eyes. It was set in an unchanging expression and as it was of the same colour all over, as dark as the darkest walnut, it might have been some quaint figure head cut out of a coarse grained wood. He was clad in a blue serge jacket, a pair of red breeches smeared at the knees with tar, clean gray worsted stockings, large steel buckles over his coarse square toed shoes, and beside him balanced upon the top of a thick oaken cudgel was a weather stained silver laced hat. His gray-shot hair was gathered up behind into a short stiff tail, and a seaman's hanger with a brass handle was girded to his waist by a tarnished leather belt.

De Catinat had been too occupied to take notice of this singular individual, but Amos Green gave a shout of delight at the sight of him, and ran forward to greet him. The others wooden face relaxed so far as to show two tobacco-stained fangs and without rising he held out a great red hand, of the size and shape of a moderate spade.

"Why, Captain Ephraim Boston" cried Amos in English "Who ever would have thought of finding you here. De Catinat, this is my old friend Ephraim Savage under whose charge I came here"

"Anchor's apeak, lad and the hatches down" said the stranger, in the peculiar drawling voice which the New Englanders had retained from their ancestors, the English puritans

"And when do you sail?"

"As soon as your foot is on her deck if Providence serve us with wind and tide. And how has all gone with thee, Amos?"

"Right well. I have much to tell you of"

"I trust that you have held yourself apart from all their Popish devilry"

"Yes, yes, Ephraim"

"And have had no truck with the scarlet woman"

"No, no. But what is it now?"

The grizzled hair was bristling with rage, and the little gray eyes were gleaming from under the heavy tufts. Amos, following their gaze, saw that De Catinat was seated with his arm round Adele while her head rested upon his shoulder.

"Ah, if I but knew their snip-snap lippetty-clippetty lingo. Saw one ever such a sight! Amos, lad, what is the French for 'a shameless hussy'?"

"Nay, nay, Ephraim. Surely one may see such a sight, and think no harm of it, on our side of the water"

"Never, Amos. In no Godly country"

"Tut, I have seen folk courting in New York"

"Ah, New York. I said in no Godly country. I cannot answer for New York or Virginia. South of Cape Cod or of Newhaven at the furthest, there is no saying what ~~they~~ folk will do. Very sure I am that in Boston or Salem or Plymouth she would see the bridewell and he the stocks for half as much. Ah!" He shook his head and bent his brows at the guilty couple.

But they and their old relative were far too engrossed with their own affairs to give a thought to the ~~old~~ Puritan seaman. De Catinat had told his tale in a few short bitter sentences, the injustice that had been done him, ~~the~~ his dismissal from the king's service, and the ruin which had come upon the huguenots of France. Adèle, ~~with~~ with the angel instinct of woman thought only of her lover and his misfortunes, as she listened to his story, but the old merchant tottered to his feet, when he heard of the revocation of the edict and stood with shaking limbs staring about him in bewilderment.

"What am I to do?" he cried "What am I to do?" I am too old to begin my life again"

"Never fear, Uncle" said de Catinat heartily "There are other lands beyond France"

"But not for me. No, no, I am too old. Lord, but Thy hand is heavy upon Thy servants. Now is the vial opened, and the carved work of the sanctuary thrown down. Ah, what shall I do, and whither shall I turn?" He wrung his hands in his perplexity

"What is amiss with him then, Amos" asked the seaman "Though I know nothing of what

he says, yet I can see that he flies a distress signal."

"He and his must leave the country, Ephraim"

"And why?"

"Because ~~the~~ they are protestants, and the king will not abide their creed"

Ephraim Savage was across the room in an instant and had enclosed the old merchant's thin hand in his own great knotted fist. There was a brotherly sympathy in his strong grip and rugged weatherstained face which held up the other's courage as no words could have done.

"What is the French for 'the scarlet woman' Amos?" he asked, glancing over his shoulder "Tell this man that we shall see him through. Tell him that we've got a country where he'll just fit in like a bung in a barrel. Tell him that religion is free to all there, and not a ~~a~~ Papist nearer than Baltimore, or the Capuchins of the Penobscot. Tell him that if he wants to come the Golden Rod is waiting with her anchor apeak and her cargo aboard. Tell him what you like so long as you make him come."

"Then we must come at once" said de Catinat, as he listened to the cordial message which was conveyed to his Uncle "Tonight the orders will be out and tomorrow it may be too late"

"But my business!" cried the merchant

"Take what valuables you can and leave the rest. Better that than lose all and liberty into the bargain"

And so at last it was arranged. That very night within five minutes of the closing of the gates there passed out of Paris a small party of five, three upon horseback and two in a closed carriage which bore several weighty boxes upon the top. They were the first leaves flying before the hurricane, the

earliest of that great multitude who were within the next few months to stream along every road which led from France, finding their Journeys end too often in galley, dungeon, and torture chamber, and yet flooding over the frontiers in numbers sufficient to change the industries, and modify the characters of all the neighbouring peoples. Like the Israelites of old they had been driven from their homes at the bidding of an angry king who, even while he exiled them, threw every difficulty in the way of their departure. Like them too there were none of them who could hope to reach their promised land without grievous wanderings, penniless, friendless and destitute. What passages befell these pilgrims in their travels, what dangers they met and over--came in the land of the Swiss, on the Rhine, among the Wallooons, in England, in Ireland, in Berlin, and even in far off Russia, has still to be written. Of this one little group however, whom we know, we may follow ~~to the~~ ~~[illegible]~~ in their latter stage ~~of their~~ venturesome Journey, and see the chances which befell them upon that great Continent which had lain fallow for so long, sown only with the weeds of humanity, but which was now at last about to quicken into such a glorious life.

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